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South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education Journal March 2022

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The South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed publication that highlights research-based best practices that improve middle schools and the learning that occurs within and outside of the classroom. Readers of this journal are generally teachers, administrators, and other educators who are interested in the issues that young adolescents ages 10-15 and educators of those individuals face. The South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education Journal is published once a year in an online format.

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Manuscript Deadline: November 30

Classroom teachers, administrators, teacher educators, pre-service teachers, graduate students, and researchers are invited to submit manuscripts to the South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education (SCAMLE) professional journal. The SCAMLE Journal welcomes high-quality manuscripts of varying lengths that address the issues and needs of young adolescents. We accept practical, theoretical, and empirical papers, literature reviews, and book reviews specific to middle level education. We also accept creative writing and original artwork from middle level students and educators. Your manuscript must be original and must not be currently submitted for publication anywhere else.

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Preparing Your Manuscript

Use the following guidelines to prepare your manuscript:

1. Include a separate cover letter:
 - a. List your name and school name, mailing address, and email address
 - b. List any co-authors in preferred order with the above information for each
 - c. Include a title, abstract (no more than 100 words), and key words
 - d. Confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere
2. The body of the manuscript should not exceed 15 pages. Text should be double-spaced in 12 point font, preferably in Microsoft Word.
3. No identifying characteristics may appear in the body of the manuscript (i.e., names of participants, authors, or schools must not appear in your manuscript).
4. All submissions must conform to the style found in the 7th edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA).
5. Full references for all citations should be included, following APA guidelines.
6. If student artifacts are included (i.e., artwork, photos, writing, etc.), authors must provide written permission releases for the use of the artifacts.
7. Images should be in .jpg format.



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Manuscripts should be typed in Microsoft Word and sent as an email attachment to SCAMLEJournal@usca.edu or deborahmc@usca.edu before the deadline.

Review of your Manuscript

The review process includes a preliminary evaluation by the journal editor for appropriateness, followed by a double blind peer-review process with at least two reviewers from the SCAMLE Journal Editorial Review Board. Acceptance is determined by the reviewers' recommendations and balance of topics in the annual issue. Your manuscript will be evaluated using the following criteria: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdpuNFkTt_EbAP6Urfw8qBy68fmMGvV7nBsWvnEP5k-tnK8hw/viewform?usp=sf_link

A decision is typically rendered within 8-10 weeks from the call deadline. Please send questions about manuscript submission to the Editor, Deborah McMurtrie, at SCAMLEJournal@usca.edu or DeborahMc@usca.edu.

ART CREDIT: Woodmont Middle School, Piedmont, SC



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Confidence Builds Competence: Creating Literate Identities as Readers and Writers

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Abstract: The authors review four texts that offer teachers of all disciplines support for creating opportunities for students to develop their literate identities as readers and writers. The texts are: *Focus Lesson: How Photography Enhances the Teaching of Writing*; *Story Matters: Teaching Teens to Use the Tools of Narrative to Argue and Inform*; *Breathing New Life into Book Clubs: A Practical Guide for Teachers*; and *Unlocking the Power of Classroom Talk: Teaching Kids to Talk with Clarity and Purpose*.

Introduction

My younger brother is 12 months my junior and during our younger years we enjoyed spending time together. Growing up, people often thought we were fraternal twins because we were similar in so many ways. We both liked and excelled in sports; we had the same sense of humor; we enjoyed the same favorite foods; and quite often, we would finish each other's sentences. There was one area where we were not similar, and that was as students. I loved school and worked hard to excel. He hated school and dropped out. I know part of his decision to drop out came from a variety of factors, but the one factor that held the most influence for him was the many messages he received throughout the years from his teachers. Early on, his teachers identified him as a struggling student. They said he was not motivated, struggled to read and write, could not focus, and, at times, acted out in class. The messages I received from my teachers were the opposite. I was identified as a good student who was engaged and motivated. The reality is that both my brother and I believed these messages and those beliefs contributed to our confidence, or lack thereof, as learners. I believed I was capable of being successful academically; my brother did not.

We are not born with beliefs, but rather, they are learned through our experiences. Our beliefs form the foundation for our identity. The development of our literate identity within academic settings is influenced by a variety of factors, one of

which is the interaction between teachers and students. Harter (2012) reports that teachers play a critical role in shaping a student's sense of self as a learner and that positive teacher-student relationships impact both the individual student and the community of learners. Students who feel valued and supported by their teachers have more opportunities for academic success.

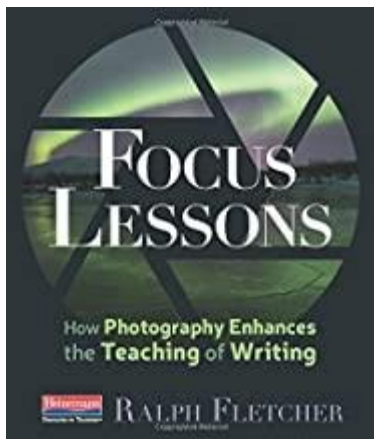
In order to develop strong teacher-student relationships, teachers first need to build a positive and supportive classroom environment. The 21st Century classroom requires a design that is student-centered where students are actively engaged in learning and where the teacher is the facilitator of that learning. In this environment, students work both collaboratively and independently to problem solve and construct knowledge. Teachers provide supportive, ongoing learning opportunities for students to develop both as strategic learners and as critical and creative thinkers. Key to the success of this model of learning is the positive relationship a teacher builds with each student in an effort to contribute to a developing sense of confidence as a learner. Teachers need to share ongoing, daily conversations with students and provide feedback on their efforts to help students understand their strengths and offer them opportunities for next steps in learning. When students are confident, they believe they can improve and grow; they understand that learning requires great effort, perseverance, and patience. As their confidence grows, they become more competent. Their identity as readers and writers becomes stronger. Growing literate identities in students is at the heart of success for each student.

This collection of resources offers teachers of all disciplines support for creating opportunities for students to develop their literate identities as readers and writers. In his book, *Focus Lessons: How Photography Enhances the Teaching of Writing* (2019), Ralph Fletcher offers a refreshing view of how to use visuals to support writers across the curriculum along with a host of strategies to engage students in authentic writing. To help teachers provide writing lessons that align narrative and expository writing, Liz Prather's book *Story Matters: Teaching Teens to Use the Tools of Narrative to Argue and Inform* (2019) provides a collection of ideas about teaching writing that supports teachers to move away from formulaic, scripted, and traditional writing lessons to embrace the intersection of creative and critical writing and see the many connections between narration and exposition. In *Breathing New Life into Book Clubs: A Practical Guide for Teachers* (2019) Sonja Cherry-Paul & Dana Johansen provide a fresh perspective on book clubs and how teachers can establish and maintain classroom book clubs that have the potential to build communities of lifelong, joyful readers. Shana Frazin & Katy Wischow's book *Unlocking the Power of Classroom Talk: Teaching Kids to Talk with Clarity and Purpose* (2020) offers

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teachers a new way to think about the power of purposeful classroom talk along with a host of strategies for teaching four authentic purposes for conversation in the classroom. These helpful resources will offer teachers new paths to explore in their classroom practice, and they will want to include these helpful resources in their professional libraries. (VAO)



Focus Lesson: How Photography Enhances the Teaching of Writing

by Ralph Fletcher 2019, 128 pp., Heinemann. ISBN: 032-510-917-6

Teaching writing is hard work for any teacher at any level. Most students do not like to write and many teachers are challenged to find

classroom practices that will engage students in any writing endeavor. As a result, oftentimes, writing gets relegated to the back burner, and students get limited practice writing for different purposes. Approximately 27% of students in grades 6-12, on average, scored at or above the proficient level which means 73% of students are below the proficient level (NAEP, 2017). These statistics are startling and signal a need for a renewed focus on writing, not just in the ELA classroom but across the curriculum. With the new state and national standards, content teachers are charged with teaching content specific writing yet, often, they are not provided the professional development to help them design a writing curriculum that will offer writing engagements that will be both of interest to students and that will meet the writing standards.

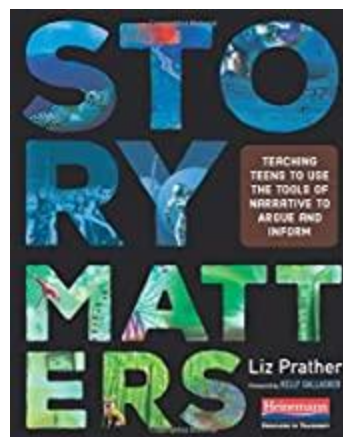
In the introduction to his book *Focus Lessons: How Photography Enhances the Teaching of Writing* (2019), Ralph Fletcher once again offers teachers new ideas to explore in their classroom practice when it comes to teaching writing. Fletcher writes: “It turns out that photography can illuminate the craft of writing and help us understand it in a whole new way.” (p. xiv). He further adds that photography in the 21st century has exploded since most people have cell phones equipped with sophisticated cameras. As such, Fletcher writes that our cameras are used to document the moments of our lives in images. Individuals can then go back and “read” their images whenever they want. Fletcher suggests that “the world is becoming increasingly visual” (p. xiv). It is clear Fletcher suggests that students not only observe photographs but share in the experiences of taking photographs.

Fletcher’s book is easy to navigate. It is divided into two sections. The first section deals with his journey into photography and his learning curve. He details how he was influenced by a friend who, at a young age, was a serious photographer. There is also a chapter on the camera as a

writer’s notebook and how the two are aligned. Fletcher admits this alignment is an emerging idea that he continues to explore. Of special interest to teachers are the sections with teaching connections that offer ideas on how to rethink the use of photography as a springboard for writing engagements. The second section is devoted first to the classroom where Fletcher offers a chapter devoted to easy to follow craft lessons. The 15 lessons are stand-alone so teachers can pick and choose lesson topics. Teachers will immediately see the many writing connections in these craft lessons with ideas for point of view, arresting detail, using an image to prompt creativity, and creating mood just to name a few. Aside from the craft lessons, section two also offers chapters that deal with topics related to photography and writing. For each of these chapters, there is a section that offers photo tips for the budding photographers. One chapter focuses first on how to do a close reading of a photograph to determine what is happening in the details and second on the photograph as a mentor text. Another chapter in section two highlights the idea of how photography is a tool for learning. It is here Fletcher suggests that teachers instruct students on how to take photographs so they aren’t merely taking a collection of images but learning how to interact with the images as well. Fletcher offers support for teachers in photography techniques for those who have limited knowledge. Throughout the chapters in section two, Fletcher offers a variety of suggestions for teachers to help them implement the use of photographs in their classrooms to enhance the writing experiences for students.

There is also a useful appendix with access to resources for finding photographs, and a partial list of photographers and their websites. Fletcher also offers a section on how to access all the photographs in the book along with additional online resources.

Students of all ages are fascinated with images and teachers are aware that images are a scaffold for both comprehension and critical/creative thinking. Using photographs to support students as writers is one way that may boost their confidence as writers. This book will offer teachers a refreshing look at their classroom writing practice that can add to their repertoire of strategies to engage students as writers through photographs. (VAO)



Story Matters: Teaching Teens to Use the Tools of Narrative to Argue and Inform

by Liz Prather, 2019, 208 pp., Heinemann. ISBN 032-509-950-2

If you were in a room full of teachers and asked them to raise their hands if they considered themselves a

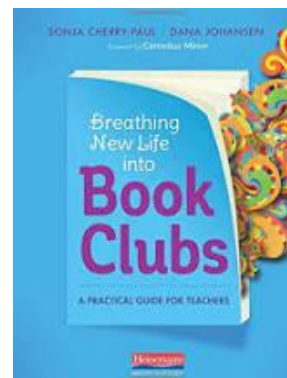
reader, I would venture to guess that 85-95% of them would raise their hands. Now, if you were to then ask this same group of teachers to raise their hands if they considered themselves to be a writer, I would venture to guess that around 30-40% would consider themselves writers. Why is this? When we think about our school writing experiences, most of us will say that we were assigned writing, given a deadline to submit the work, then waited for the grade. We have all had the school experience of getting a writing assignment back and seeing nothing but red marks all over the paper. Even if there were comments made by the teacher, most of the time those comments were about errors in spelling, grammar, and organization rather than celebrations of the ideas presented. These experiences shaped how we saw ourselves as writers, and most of us listened to the voices that said we were not good writers.

Too often, teachers in grades 6-12 focus writing instruction on formulaic expository writing assignments that are graded and returned to students with little or no follow up on what students can do to improve. With the new state and national standards argumentative and informational writing have taken precedence over narrative writing. Often the poetry, personal narratives, writer's notebooks, writing conferences, and personal publishing, get left to the end of the semester if there is time – and most often there is no time. In her book *Story Matters: Teaching Teens to Use the Tools of Narrative to Argue and Inform* (2019), Liz Prather encourages teachers to embrace narrative writing as an entrée into expository writing. She encourages teachers to cast off the notion that narrative writing is inferior to expository writing, that facts and analysis are more important than story. For Prather, narration is embedded in all exposition and can be found in textbooks, medical journals, political speeches, and scientific lab reports. It is the narrative details in these writings that keep the reader interested. In her classroom, Prather calls this form of writing narrative nonfiction and she defines it for her students as “informational or argumentative text, that uses a story or a few narrative techniques to engage the reader” (p. 6). She believes that students are willing to write stories about their lives and they can grow as writers by being successful story tellers. The writing skills they develop through narrative writing can be applied to all writing situations; they are not genre specific. Prather is not alone in her claim that narrative writing is an important step in developing confident writers. Hillocks (2006) writes that narrative writing is interesting to learners since it allows them to write about meaningful experiences, then reflect on and learn from them. Students are more motivated to write about themselves than about an assigned topic that lacks relevance to them.

Prather's book has seven stand-alone chapters that teachers can easily navigate. Teachers will find chapter 1 “Narrative as Home Base, Ground Zero, Mother Ship” a must read. Here Prather makes her argument that all writing, both expository and narration, employ solid writing skills and that these skills are not genre specific. She offers examples of expository texts that use narrative techniques and suggests that students need opportunities to use mentor texts, like her examples, to read and analyze to determine the balance between narration and

exposition. Through repeated exposure to these mentor texts, and with practice in writing narrative nonfiction, students will then see the many connections between the two writing forms. Prather offers a list of 15 narrative techniques (p. 22) employed by one author that will be helpful to teachers. In subsequent chapters, Prather explores narrative techniques such as finding the story element, creating tension, using characters, determining structure, exercising effective word choice. She also demonstrates how each can be used in narrative nonfiction. There are many lessons, engagements, activities, and samples offered throughout the book. In addition, there are appendices which include a sample unit plan and a list of mentor texts.

Teachers who want to build on student confidence and identity as writers will want to have this book in their professional library. Prather's book has the potential to inform classroom writing practice in new and interesting ways. (VAO)



Breathing New Life into Book Clubs: A Practical Guide for Teachers

by Sonja Cherry-Paul & Dana Johansen, 2019, 176 pp., Heinemann. ISBN 978-032-507-685-0

Think about how an ideal book club for you and your friends would look and sound. Now think about how book clubs for your students would look and sound. Are they the same? Are you filled with doubts about trying classroom book clubs? Have you given up on book clubs, or decided they aren't worth the effort? If this describes you, you aren't alone. It also describes many teachers of all grade levels who have either given up on book clubs or are unwilling to try them.

In “Chapter 1: Creating a Culture of Reading through Book Clubs,” the authors of this book extend an open invitation to teachers who are looking to breathe new life into their already established book clubs as well as teachers who are looking to establish book clubs for their readers. The authors are strong believers in books clubs as a way for all students to make gains in reading achievement while simultaneously developing reading identities as lifelong readers.

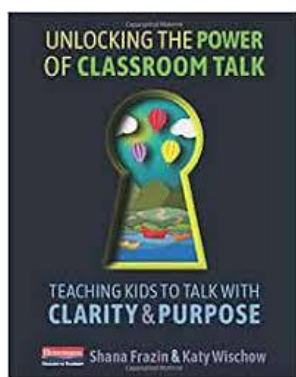
After reviewing research related to classroom book clubs, the authors conclude how (1) several terms such as literature circles, learning clubs, etc. have been used interchangeably with the phrase *book clubs*; (2) the two defining principles of a book club are *choice* and *ownership*; and, (3) the benefits of book clubs extend far beyond reading comprehension to include influencing “students as they develop as critical thinkers, lifelong readers, and change makers in the world” (p. 7).

Readers of this book are asked to think of the eight essential components for book clubs as a Ferris wheel. “You can see in your mind a joyful experience filled with friends and laughter.

The wheel is a circle of interconnected pieces that go around and around, and at the center of the wheel is the hub” (p. 8). The authors go on to explain the importance of each part and how the parts work together. They state that at the center, the hub, is the discussion. After all, this is the primary reason for the creation of the book club. They continue to explain that rotating around the hub are the remaining seven essential components. These include planning, reading, digital tools, written response, observation, coaching, and assessment.

The remaining chapters in the book focus on critical parts of the journey that are necessary to breathe new life into book clubs. In chapter 2, readers will learn how to organize and set up book clubs by considering logistics of getting books and grouping students. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 include mini-lessons as well as thinking about issues such as fitting book clubs into the curriculum, managing student-led discussions, and scaffolding readers as they journey together through a text. The authors conclude the book by offering culminating activities that give students ways to celebrate their clubs’ achievements while extending their reading beyond the classroom walls.

If we want all students to grow and change as readers while developing their individual reading identities, we need to rethink our ideas about establishing and maintaining classroom book clubs that have the potential to build communities of lifelong, joyful readers. It is our job as teachers to understand how to establish classroom conditions where students will feel encouraged to take risks as readers and empowered enough to talk freely with peers about their thinking. As Sonja and Dana write, “Book clubs create close-knit communities of readers and thinkers and help students become lifelong readers” (p. 3). This book is an excellent new resource to help all teachers on their journeys to “take part in a reading revolution by breathing new life into book clubs” (p. 152). JRG



Unlocking the Power of Classroom Talk: Teaching Kids to Talk with Clarity and Purpose

by Shana Frazin & Katy Wischow, 2019, 160 pp.

Heinemann.

ISBN 978-032-509-871-5

Students who actively engage in authentic book club gatherings luxuriate in talk. It is in a book

club that students can critically analyze text as they talk about their own connections, questions, inferences, important ideas, and images created by the author’s choice of words. If this describes the kind of student talk teachers want to hear in book clubs, how can this talk be nurtured? Is there a need to teach middle level students *how* to talk?

This book offers teachers a new way to think about the power of classroom talk. Readers will feel like the authors are sitting

alongside them sharing their beliefs as well as providing them with opportunities for “Listening in on Talk” and “Naming What’s Noteworthy.” Readers will appreciate the visuals included in the book that provide support for or examples of strategies for teaching purposeful talk. This book has nine chapters divided into three parts: “Foundations of Talk,” “Purposes for Talk,” and “Leveling Up Your Talk.”

Part One contains the authors’ beliefs about talk. They point out that just “like reading, writing, math, art, tennis, singing, or anything else worth doing, talk is something that people can get better at” (p. 4). However, getting better at a skill takes deliberate practice, powerful teaching, and supportive coaching. In other words, just as teachers purposefully plan for teaching content area skills across all disciplines, the authors point out that teaching talk “is an essential part of the equation” (p. 4). They propose that, in the same way writers go through a process for writing, great conversationalists follow a process of collecting and generating ideas, choosing what to say, developing their choice, acting on the talk, and reflecting on the whole process. Naming these predictable parts of the “talk cycle” makes them explicit for teaching and student learning (pp. 14-15).

Think about typical classroom talk where students routinely answer questions, recite bits of information, offer definitions, and share what they remember and understand of the content. The authors name this talk as *reporting*. Students report when they genuinely cannot imagine another purpose for having a conversation. In Part Two, the authors give readers strategies for teaching four authentic purposes for conversation in the classroom.

The first purpose is to build relationships. Through this talk, “students come to know each other and themselves more deeply. Talking to build relationships builds a stronger community” (p. 33). The authors share five strategies that teachers can use to help students bridge the gap between social talk and academic talk.

The second purpose is to play with ideas. The authors write: “This is talk for the pure joy of discovering what new thinking might emerge if we talk long enough...Playing with ideas lets kids dwell in possibility” (p. 47). Four instructional strategies support teaching of this purpose.

The third purpose is to clarify, analyze, and argue. Even though the authors point out that “this talk is hard to teach, hard to assess, and hard to coach” (p. 63), they also share eight strategies teachers can use to help students develop critical thinking and talking skills. This way of talking is the academic discourse of disciplines. It is the talk of disciplinary insiders---a critical part of disciplinary literacy. Students in middle school classrooms must learn how to talk authentically across content areas and disciplines. This book provides excellent support for teachers seeking to elevate students’ academic discourse.

The fourth purpose circles back to the beginning of Part Two—talking to report. After all, how could classroom talk exist without having students answer questions, recite bits of

information, offer definitions, and share what they remember and understand? The key to this purpose is teaching students to consider purpose and audience. Included are five strategies teachers can use to help students learn authentic uses for reporting.

In Part Three, the authors consider the relationship between listening and talking; making talk visible by celebrating, going public, and assessing; and what to do when there are problems. Additionally, they provide a list of supplemental videos and online resources.

Teachers who read this book will find practical ideas to enhance existing curriculum. It is not a matter of adding-on yet another thing to teach; it is a matter of equipping middle school students with the tools they need for social and academic success. As the authors write: "But if you define talk as communication, self-expression, exploration, and getting ideas across, then it becomes even more urgent that all kids have access to instruction that helps them participate" (p. 7). JRG

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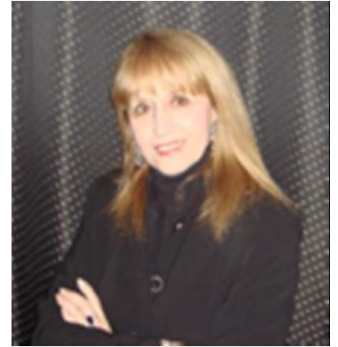
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Melody and Memory: Black Language in the Low Country

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Abstract: Black Language has historically been marginalized as a broken form of Standard English forcing the speakers of this language to conform and devalue their native tongue. This impact has led to a negative stigma on Black Language and forced Black people to relinquish their cultural literacies. This study reflects on understanding why Black Language must be recognized as a legitimate language. It also illustrates why Black Language should be welcomed into the classroom as it provides a pathway to self-actualization affording Black students the opportunity to self-define and self-validate their existence. Special emphasis is placed on how language impacts adolescent identity development.

Keywords: Black Language, English/language arts instruction, adolescents, classroom practice, language and literacies.

Introduction

This manuscript is a confluence of voices: Two Black university professors at a Historically Black University in the Southeast, two middle-level adolescent students and their familial support network. Using Black Language served as a catalyst for transformative healing; allowing three generations to discuss their intersecting identities and bear witness to each other's memories. To resist racist linguistic representations, students must confront the colonizing ideology by developing a linguistic critical consciousness. In short, we must confront linguisticism by fully loving and embracing our Blackness. The study elucidates how Black Language can cultivate healing while promoting academic success. The paper begins by discussing Black Language as an act of love; we then share interview excerpts to demonstrate the vulnerability needed to analyze wounds inflicted by linguisticism. We conclude by sharing pedagogical insights for English/language arts educators.

"I never realized I say, "fetch" because my grandmother said it or that my great

grandparents would never say "yesterday," but instead "ye-stidy." I guess that's why I make a point to say I love you before I hang up the phone. 'Cause it would seem that if I heard it said to me, I would remember."

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It began with a simple task: interview a student, their parent or guardian and community member to learn their perceptions on language. We chose to focus on Cree (*pseudonym*), an 8th grader affectionately called *Miracle* because she is a cancer survivor. Cree is blessed to have a strong support network including her mother, Sabrina; her godparents, Deacon James D., and his wife Patrice; and her cousins Deacon Cliff, his wife Carrie, and their daughter Sinclair (*pseudonyms*). We asked questions and carefully listened to their stories, realizing that by delving into their language memories, we simultaneously explored the intricacies of our mother tongue Black Language. Their revelations helped us to fully conceptualize the beauty and complexity of language and to better understand key concepts in the study of language for young adolescents and its connection to their identity and development.

There is an inherent power and majesty in language. Whether it is in the whispered phrase, "I love you," or the lingering remnants of words such as "ye-stidy," or "fetch," language shapes our identity (Baker-Bell, 2019; Boutte, 2012; Hudley & Mallinson, 2013; Kinloch, 2005). Language allows us to negotiate space and is the cornerstone of relationships. Flowing within everyone, language is fluid and visceral (Boutte & Johnson, 2012; Delpit & Dowdy, 2008; Hutcheson, 2005; Ana, 2004). The nuances of language, heard or seen, shape our memories and tint our perception of the world (Fu, 2009; Hutcheson, 2005; Ogulnick et al., 2000). But what happens when language is marginalized? Our language, Black Language, has historically held this unpleasant distinction.

Though linguists long ago designated Black Language as a rule-governed, literary-oriented, historically constructed language (Boutte, 2012; Haddix, 2016; Kinloch, 2010), many in society, including educators, still advocate a monolingual literacy approach explicitly devaluing Black Language as improper English (Baker-Bell, 2019, 2020; Kinloch, 2005, 2010; McMurtry, 2021; Smitherman, 2006). This paper outlines the dangers of unilaterally adopting such an attitude.

The stories of these participants are critical in understanding why Black Language must be recognized as a legitimate language. In particular, young adolescents, who are proficient in the language, should be granted the freedom to express themselves freely through language that is relevant to them. Middle-level educators must ask themselves: How will I engage my students' thinking about language power, language privilege (entitlement) and linguisticism in my classroom (Bishop & Harrison, 2021; Muhammad, 2018)? By removing

Black Language negative connotation, society will affirm the positive identities of Black Language speakers as well support the art of translation between Black Language and Mainstream English (ME). Blending linguistic and language acquisition theory with their heartfelt words, what follows are concepts learned from listening to our participants' voices. Each participant adds a layer of insight. Each story weaves new wisdom. Simply put, it is the story of three generations, discussing a language denied.

*There is an inherent power and
majesty in language.*

More than Words: Black Language is a Complex Linguistic Melody

I am from language as a melody.
words movin' so fast,
they weave a tapestry of music...
I am from a language many deem broken.
It was never fragmented for me.
To me, it was harmony.
It was our rhythm.
(Smith, 2012).

Music and melody have always been a component of Black Language (Hudley & Mallinson, 2013; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2006) and an essential component of life in South Carolina's Low Country. Whether it is the pulse of the spoken language, the church hymns evoking shouts and tears or the pounding baseline of rap, music has always laced our language. This can be especially seen as Cree introduces herself because almost every descriptor is connected to that music and melody.

Music is not simply a way to introduce herself; it is a means of "articulating the pleasures and problems of her life [while allowing her to] speak with the voice of personal experience, taking on the identity of the observer or narrator" (Rose, 1992, p. 4). Using words and gestures, she explains the pace of her language by saying: "My language is a slow vibe. But when I'm on the computer trying to make a rap song, it's like a fast vibe, you know. It's like that instrumental beat." Cree acknowledges that language is more complex than weaving words; it can also involve pace, pitch and tone and gestures (Baker-Bell, 2019, 2020; Ogulnick et al., 2000; Ana, 2004; Smitherman, 2006). It is through experimenting with this repertoire that Cree is able to express various facets of her identity. She notes, "When I'm in a crunk mood. I just be crumpin'. I jus' go wild like I'm at a party."

It is clear to see that that Hip Hop speaks to Cree's burgeoning adolescent identity and allows her to express realities that using ME may not (Baker-Bell, 2019, 2020; Love, 2016). This is the one of the many powers of Black Language. It has a "life, voice and clarity" (Jordan, 1982) that ME simply cannot successfully emulate. Busta Rhymes' stirring words describing

Hip Hop, also aptly describe Black Language: "It is poetry, storytelling, and rhythm. It reflects the truth . . . It's a platform to offer information but it is also an escape."

Language is a Currency of Power: An Internal Conflict Leading to Dual Selves

Black Language is not exactly a linguistic buffalo; as children, most of the thirty-five million Afro-Americans living here depending on this language for our discovery of the world . . . we should understand its status as an endangered species, as a perishing, irreplaceable system of community intelligence, or we should expect its extinction, and along with that, the extinguishment of much that constitutes our own proud and singular identity (Jordan, 1985, p.160).

Humans do not simply speak language to communicate; we are our language (Gonzalez, 2006). This dynamic process affords the opportunity to view ourselves as cultural beings and as participants in a larger society. If language, such Black Language, is marginalized in middle-level ELA classrooms it creates a distorted image of reality or dueling or fractured identities. June Jordan (1985) eloquently uses the metaphor of the distorted mirror to illustrate this principle. She notes:

We begin to group up in a house where every true mirror shows us the face of somebody who does not belong there, whose walk and whose talk will never look or sound "right," because that house was meant to shelter a family that is alien and hostile to us. (p.161)

Proficiency in the current language of power (ME) - while certainly not self-affirming for all people because it represents a second language, a language divorced from the sounds and structures of the language of their communities and heritage - can offer access to institutions of power. Language scholars are clear that Mainstream English (ME) proficiency is essential because of its inherent ties to social status and upward mobility (Baker-Bell, 2019, 2020; Boutte, 2012; Kinloch, 2005; McMurtry, 2021), a reality that also leads to the conflicting dual self. We must resist revering polarizing dichotomies and realize that our students need home language and ME versus having to choose between home language or ME.

This central theme - the necessity of learning ME as a language currency of power while struggling with the conflict of the dual self - was reiterated by several participants in this study. For example, Cliff explained that he and his wife, Carrie, intentionally taught their children to gain proficiency in a speech pattern different from their own so they could "advance more than what we are." He talked about his children's exposure to school fieldtrips and interacting with people outside of the Black race as factors in this development. In addition, he and his wife emphasized using ME within the home setting. He explained:

Da whole thing was dat you be better . . . that ya'll would be better than what, what . . . advance more than what we are...than our two....We

wanted that you would be able to master English and move on to better things than what we have or what we did.

Agreeing with her husband, Carrie's memories delved further into why she modeled using ME for her children. Her reasoning was tightly interwoven with memories of being ostracized or being treated as an "*other*" throughout her life. She recollected her childhood memories of growing up in the rural south in the 1950s:

Well, you sorta got looked down on or laughed at. So, then that's one reason, I think we probably spoke one way at home and then when we got in public we tried to sorta blend in with everyone else and because of that...we did lose the beauty of our family language.

Because they both spoke Black Language with ease as they shared these thoughts with me, it was clear that Cliff and Carrie had not renounced their mother tongue, yet they both felt that learning ME was an entry point to a better life, hence the dual self and conflicts inherent in that reality. Carrie regrettably acknowledged that employing this practice in a society that does not yet understand how these two languages can co-exist in the educational lives of our children, tainted memories and jeopardized the sustainability of her home language.

James D. also mentioned the conflict of only being taught the importance of becoming proficient in ME as the language currency of power. His memories centered on being taught ME in grade school. He reminisced about how tough his teachers were in correcting what he called, "improper speech" or "country talk." When he was queried about his teacher's strict ME guidelines, James shared insights that reveal his own internal contradictions – on one hand perceiving ME as "the right way," "the proper way," the "educated" way; and on the other hand recognizing that outside of school, the language of his community was equally legitimate:

James:

Ms. McCray use to be on us hardest about the way we speak...the children... She was hard on the children about certain things about speaking and the way you carry yourself and certain things like that. I think she played the biggest part in gettin' us to speak the right way.

Authors:

Then why do you think Ms. McCray tried to teach you something different?

James:

You know, she had the education and stuff like that...and she knew that a lot of times we were gonna be coming into contact with other people that were different from us ...different areas and stuff like that and she was tryin' to get us to learn the proper way to

talk to these people but once we leave the school...it was right back to the country!

While James realized that he possesses two different ways of speaking, he did not consider himself bilingual. He simply observed how one language garnered him success within school and in life, and the other language helped him to negotiate his home environment. It is obvious with the designation of "proper way to talk," that he felt that there was one language that held the key to his future success, but this also indicated that he viewed his home language as improper at least in particular contexts.

For Sabrina, mother of participant Cree, one measure of success is managing a career. Although she appreciates and values her home language, she recognizes that it alone is not enough to provide security for her family. In her interview, she directly correlates proficiency in English with finding and maintaining employment. When asked to discuss whether she was bilingual, Selena at first stated she was not, but when reminded of her bilingual abilities, she reconsidered her previous answer and said:

You are right about that. I am going to correct myself with that Ebonics ...Everybody got a little Ebonics in them... I know that for a fact! So, yes, I can say that I am bilingual. It's just the bilingual that I have is just not the one that they are looking for on applications.

In truth, obtaining ME proficiency allows a sense of security. Yet this security often comes at great cost. These participants bear witness to the harsh reality of reconciling two warring ideals: "Black folk loving, embracing, using Black talk, while simultaneously rejecting and hatin' on it" (Smitherman, 2006, p. 6). Essentially, denying a mother tongue can create dual consciousness (Boutte, 2012; Delpit & Dowdy, 2008) which can create gravesites of regret and roadmaps of pain. Although ME proficiency is necessary for success, it alone cannot help people of Color to negotiate their lives and communities.

However, the realities of the dual self might not lead to such tensions in adolescent identity development *if* schools and society recognized Black Language as a legitimate, rule governed, historically based language and as a literary and academic tool by the most renowned novelists (Baldwin, 1953; Hurston, 1937; Morrison, 1987; Walker, 1982), poets (Angelou, 1994; Dunbar, 2021; Johnson et al., 2008), and academics (Smitherman, 2006). Teaching in this manner displays the inherent power of Black Language and connects it to a long and robust Black literary heritage. This could enable healing and affirm dual cultural and linguistic identities in positive ways as educators employ dual-language approaches that "value the student's home languages equally as much as English, society's dominant language in schools" (Fu, 2009, p.11).

We could create more positive dualities by building on the advice of language and equity scholars who urge the teaching

of ME while ensuring that home languages are not denigrated but are utilized because of their linguistic, academic, and literary value (Boutte, 2012; Fu, 2009; Hudley & Mallinson, 2013; Kinloch, 2005& 2010; Smitherman, 2006). In this way, all students would come to appreciate the multiplicity of languages around them while gaining proficiency in the language of power, an acknowledged gateway to success.

Language is a Collective and Shared Memory That Can Be Lost

Listening to the participants' words and memories resembled walking through a cultural graveyard. This is because language is more than a mere collection of words. Instead, the roots of our present-day language are deeply entrenched in the past (Boutte, 2012; Kinloch, 2010; Rickford & Rickford, 2000). Smitherman (2006) notes that Black Language derives, "from the experience of the U.S. Slave descendants. This shared experience has result in common speaking styles, systematic patterns of grammar, and common language practices in the Black Community" (p. 3). The unique words and stylistic phrasings add a "flava" and flair to Black Language that is remarkably distinctive. Nonetheless, the "flava" of a language can only last as long as its memory. In their interviews, Carrie and Sinclair discuss the challenge that occurs when language begins to fade from memory; when words that once lingered on the lips seem foreign to the ear and unfamiliar to the tongue.

"On'na bet' get ou' of da road! On'na bet' get ou' of da road!" Sinclair reminisces about her Great-grandmother, Ma Stella, standing on her front porch and yelling across the yard to her grandchildren: If the children were playing in the road and she wanted them to move or come out, she wouldn't say, "You all come out of the road," she would say, On'na bet' get ou' of da road." What she was saying is she wanted all of the children to come out of the road.

Although the meaning of the phrase still holds true, Sinclair readily admits that is rarely used or heard today. This, she argued, is why she believes her home language, Black Language, should be preserved and protected:

It's a part of your history and your heritage. I think that we have gotten to the point where we feel ...that it shouldn't be valued until it is lost and you think to yourself, 'You know that is part of who I am that is gone now.' I think sometimes now, especially younger generations, they don't even question how their speech patterns became the way that it is or why they use certain terms.

This was certainly the case for the authors. The word "fetch" has always been a part of our speaking repertoire. It was not uncommon for us to ask the students in my class if they would "fetch" the graded papers from out of the box or "fetch" a student from another teacher's class. As she laughed and reminisced with her husband, Cliff, she reminded him of a language memory he'd long since forgotten: "Your mother

didn't say bring me this or go get this. She would always say, 'Fetch' and I wasn't familiar with it. I never heard dat word."

Carrie recollected another word that has diminished in our memory: "ye-stidy." Used instead of yesterday, "ye-stidy" was a method noting time. Unlike, fetch, however Carrie admits that she did not use "ye-stidy" because she feared people would not understand her. She recalls:

I was reared by my grandparents and um...lot of things they said, a lot of words they used, I don't use. For example, my grandfather would say "We did that ye-stidy," and that would be yesterday... somebody coming from ...ah...let's say another state or maybe even the upper part of SC, they probably wouldn't understand what they were talking about.

Carrie too, put forth a solid argument for preserving Black Language. She argued, "We are losing so much. We don't even realize until an art form ...and language is an art form... has been lost. Then we wish... we had something or some kind of reminder from the past." Critics would argue that, as these words fade, other words can easily be used to replace them; but others argue that to dismiss their value is to overlook the heart of Black Language (Boutte, 2012). Why do these participants mourn the loss of their language?

Because it came naturally; because it was authentic; because it resonated for them, touching some timbre within, and capturing a vital core of experience that had to be expressed *just so*; because it reached the heart and mind and soul of the addressee or audience in a way no other variety quite did. (Rickford & Rickford, 2002, p. 222)

Since language is an integral part of our identity, when we lose our language we lose a part of ourselves, but we also lose much more. If it is commonly accepted that language is a currency of power, by losing a language, a student is also unknowingly relinquishing their power. To heal identities long since fractured and promote cultural awareness and pride as well as a balance of power, Black Language must be shift from its relegated position of "other" and moved to the linguistic mainstream (Baker-Bell, 2020; Haddix, 2017).

The stories of these participants are critical in understanding why Black Language must be recognized as a legitimate language.

To Demean My Language is to Demean My Identity

We are all the walking wounded (V. Oglan, personal communication, June 2011). Some scars are visible marring our skin; while others, although present, are invisible and not quite so easily recognized. Such can be said about many

language wounds. They lie just below the surface, invisible to the eye, yet still felt by the heart. It is those scars that are often found hard to walk from away because, “when children are stripped of their cultural literacies, they are forced to believe that the world and all the good things in it were created by others” (Delpit, 2002). Young adolescents are more self-conscious about their evolving identity at this stage, compared to any other stage in life, so developing a clear and stable identity becomes quite difficult when personal factors of their lives are challenged (Verhoeven, Poorthuis, & Volman, 2019). This belief held true for Cree.

Cree remembers it vividly: the teacher, the assignment, and the grade. During her seventh-grade year, she was tasked with writing about an embarrassing incident. Cree chose to write about the day her wig came over in gym class. She recalls, “I wrote on the paper. I been up in the gym and me wig piece had fell out. I just remember it been circled and my teacher writing that it was wrong. How you gonna tell me that my story was wrong? I was so mad! I was so angry!”

So focused on only one language model of grammar and semantics, she did not realize that Cree was using Black Language, a legitimate, rule-governed language as she eloquently “focused on spilling her imagination onto the page” (Pratt, 2004). He or she did not realize that the corrections were viewed as a commentary not only on Cree’s paper but also on her life. When we asked Cree to recall how she replied to her teacher, she said, “I didn’t say nothing. I didn’t know what to say.” The teacher had denied Cree’s home-language, the teacher thereby rendering Cree voluntary mute (Delpit, 2002; Fu, 2009; Hudley & Mallinson, 2013). Dr. Orlando Taylor (2004) reminds educators that: Language reflects a people... The problem is that Black people are perceived by dominant societies to be inferior, and so their language is perceived in a similar way (quoted in Hamilton, 2005, p. 35). Since language is “a reflection of a people,” by rejecting her home language, the teacher simultaneously rejected Cree.

It was not until Sabrina explained to Cree that, when writing for class she should not write as she speaks, that Cree noticed the differences between Black Language and ME. She recalls, “I didn’t even realize it was wrong because that’s how I use to talk at that moment. I was like... What do you mean that is wrong?” Since Cree never received instruction on the legitimacy of Black Language nor explicitly told rules governing code-switching or choosing a language appropriate for the context, she willingly accepted the notion that her language use was “wrong” and “incorrect.” While the teacher might also have provided instruction on the use of Black Language as a literary tool, she choose not to. This is a perfect example of how a “correctionalist model” of language instruction rather than employing a critical and equitable linguistic framework eradicates a student’s home language. Linda Christensen (2009) contends:

Whether it’s the marking down of essays because of “poor” grammar or the conscious or unconscious way that lack of linguistic dexterity marks a speaker or writer as “unfit” for a

position — a job, a college, or a scholarship — language inequality still exists. The power of the standard language is so pervasive and so invisible that students need to uncover what they take for granted and internalize as personal failure. (p. 210)

Black Language is just as linguistically civilized as classical Greek or Latin, and as linguistically sophisticated as French or Italian. Black Language is a natural way of speaking; therefore, young adolescents should not be forced to conform to systems and practices that do not understand or embrace the value and legitimacy of Black Language.

***To deny a student their language
is to limit their identity development
and deny self-actualization.***

Conclusion

The battle over using Black Language is one mired in issues of race and class (Boutte, 2012 Kinloch, 2010; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 2006). Yet, we speak who we are. To deny a student their language is to limit their identity development and deny self-actualization. Linguists advocate for both Black Language and ME as necessary and effective in multiple contexts; recognizing both languages for their potential as we develop a more equitable society and come to better view ourselves, each other, and our world. Valuing, trusting, and acknowledging students’ language is a right for everyone (Ana, 2004; Baker-Bell, 2020; Bishop & Harrison, 2021; Delpit, 2002; Fu, 2009; Haddix, 2016). Doing so builds on students’ funds of knowledge while helping them to develop and hone useful linguistic tools. In short, the strength and knowledge of home languages are used not only to create proficiency in a new language, but to bring multiple rich languages into the curriculum and the classroom thereby enhancing possibilities for expression and for broadened world views and healthy identity development.

If educators do not embrace this approach and drastically alter the curricular paradigm, we are consciously choosing to create walking wounds that continuously inflict pain. Baker-Bell (2017) offers these questions for teachers to nurture curricular and pedagogical transformation: (1) Are your assignments and pedagogy using ME as the standard?; (2) Are your students learning about the historical, cultural, politic, and racial-linguistic aspects of Black Language?; (3) Are your students learning that Black Language is a rule-governed language?; (4) Are your students learning about how language and race intersect?; (5) Are you teaching students Black Language is only used in informal settings? These questions cannot be used in conjunction with a culturally relevant and sustaining curriculum. It is as one of our participants, Sinclair, said: “Mainstream English is a WAY of speaking but there are other ways of speaking too. Just because my language is

different from your language doesn't mean that I am wrong, or you are right...It just means we are speaking differently."

Sinclair poignantly argues that all languages should be appreciated and that every person has a right to their own language. This stance implies trust and collaboration because to see me is to hear my story. To hear my story is to witness my language. To witness my language means you that truly see and validate my person. Is that not what we all desire in this world?

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No Cap: Unlocking the Self-Concepts of Students to Promote Limitless Identities

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Abstract: If students do not perceive themselves as capable, they will likely decline opportunities that threaten their self-beliefs. This requires educators to create redefining moments for students to experience struggle in a safe environment that ultimately encourages students to remove personal limitations. When teachers are critical about ways to respond to negative, limiting self-concepts, students may conquer breakthroughs in learning. In this article, I suggest that a change in self-concept represents a change in mindset, producing significant learning outcomes. To accomplish this, I will discuss self-concept, self-efficacy, and implications on teaching, using the CARE theory of self-concept development.

Keywords: self-concept, self-efficacy, mindset, learning outcomes

Introduction

In recent years, educators have invested resources in rewriting curriculum, building student stamina, leveraging technology, creating academic tracks, responding to inequities, and implementing interventions to improve literacy. While these are important to educational leaders, the deciding factor of students' performance is not inextricably connected to amount of resources poured into the classroom but rather the combination of students' self-concepts and reflective appraisals of others regarding their succeeding potential. Current literature supports that self-perceptions are powerful and have the power to influence cognition and behavior (Zelenak, 2020). The repetition of negative self-narratives learners replay about their abilities can *lock* the potential to excel beyond past performance. Louise Hay's (2004) work teaches that self-concept can be used as limitations and resistance to change. When learners create a narrative about their learning possibilities, behavior, academic performance, and social interaction all elements of their lives orbit the narrative, responding in accordance with what they believe. Emerging findings in neuroplasticity research support the assertion that educators play a vital role in interrupting students' self-concepts in efforts to transform performance in and beyond the classroom (Boaler, 2019; Jensen, 2009). Thus, the following questions are elevated to dialogue: What if the

answer to unlock the learning potential of learners was to intentionally change their beliefs about themselves? What must educators know about self-concept necessary to uproot personally-enforced limitations? How does self-fulfilled prophecy impose limitations on student progress? How do students internalize subtle messages within the learning community, creating a cap on how much they are able to achieve?

A coined colloquial in the Black/hip hop community, "no cap" is a term often used to express truth or authenticity; in other words, not kidding, no lies. In other contexts, the informal phrase suggests there are "no limits" or "no maximum" on the possibilities. Parallel to the goal of this article, when educators facilitate the unlocking of students' self-concepts, students are equipped to embrace opportunities to demonstrate limitless possibilities in and beyond the classroom. According to Hawk (1967), what a person thinks of himself consciously or unconsciously serves as the determinant of future behavior. Therefore, the pathway to academic achievement is through passionate exploration of self-belief. Enhancing students' perceptions of themselves is the key to upward trajectory in learners' achievement.

A Better Understanding of Self-Concept

Pioneering psychologist, William James, is known for coining the idea of self-concept as he endeavored to understand behavior during the late nineteenth century. The term has been contemporized over the years as researchers and educators seek to better understand the determinants of behavior and academic performance. For example, Epstein (1973) offers self-concept as a theory that one holds of his or herself and their interaction with the world. Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) provide a broad definition of self-concept:

"Self-concept, broadly defined, is a person's perception of his or herself. These perceptions are formed through one's experience with and interpretation of one's environment...and are influenced especially by reinforcements, evaluations of significant others..." (p. 411)

This definition describes how self-concept is initially formed and the reinforcements in daily life through those in social environments. Individuals absorb knowledge of the self from media outlets, reflected appraisals, and social comparisons, which form as an aggregate to confirm and expand their self-perceptions (Kunjufu, 2000; Brown, 2008).

The literature often confounds referents of self-concept by referring to it as self-image, ego, and self-perception. However, simply defined, self-concept is the image that one holds of themselves (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993). In all cases, this self-image can be observed through one's selection of tasks,

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perseverance, and social relationships. Meurisse (2018) offers a more illustrative description to self-concept: the ego, which he defines as the story that one constructs throughout their lives. Meurisse suggests self-concept relies on things, people, beliefs, and ideas for confirmation. As a result, individuals use their self-concepts as a measuring tool for sense-making. To illustrate further, one who has difficulty on a mathematics exam, could embrace the idea: “I am not a math person; therefore, I never do well at math.” This fixed mindset is rooted in the self-concept. Naturally, self-concept seeks to protect and defend itself when faced with something challenging (Fay & Funk, 1995). Rather than learn techniques and employ effective study habits, a learner may use self-concept to as the authorizing story that makes the individual comfortable with the outcomes, justifying their failed attempt.

One should further note that self-concept is complex in that it interprets the gestures and words of others to define the self. Nathaniel Branden’s work on self explains how the adolescent determines their self-perceptions in response to adult behavior. When a child is constantly rejected or does not receive love through verbal expressions, nurturing actions, or the celebration of one’s being, this is the subtle message the child deduces: “I am not lovable or worthy of love” (Branden, 1994, p. 176). This example illustrates how those who surround the child all play an important part in the shaping of their self-concepts.

Whether a child is challenged by subject matter, struggles with securing friends, worries about their physical shape, or experiences daily criticism in the home, the adult should be mindful that their response to children may reinforce or interrupt a negative self-image. However, this requires educators to be intentional and responsive to enhance the self-concepts of learners in their schools, thus unlocking their personal limitations. To that end, the educators must be aware of the ways their self-concepts manifest in learning environments and create impositions on student growth. That is an idea for a future article.

From Self-Concept to Self-Efficacy

The constructs of self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, are often confounded in the literature and particularly used interchangeably (Lee, 2018). It is important to distinguish how these constructs are inter-related, yet dependent of each other in order to better understand how educators may inspire change in children. As mentioned earlier, self-concept is the mental image one holds of themselves. When faced with activities or tasks, the self-concept is transposed and situated within the context of one’s ability to achieve or perform. Self-efficacy is significant to human functioning as it impacts, goals, expectations, perceptions, aspirations, and limitations.

Bandura (2006) defines self-efficacy as one’s beliefs about their capacity to produce given attainments, which are also linked to distinct realms of functioning. This set of beliefs surrounding one’s achieving possibilities may lead one to think optimistically or pessimistically, persevering or resisting challenge. Since self-efficacy is not a universal trait, one may

be an outstanding athlete but possess an astronomical volume of self-doubt regarding their reading comprehension. Further, there is no global measure to determine how students will perform with the various domains of the learning community. The skills and knowledge base necessary for a robotics project differ from effective musical delivery on a school chorus.

Bandura maintains scales to measure self-efficacy must be tailored to the particular domain of functioning that is the object of interest (Bandura, 2006, p. 307). However, there are generic self-regulatory skills to diagnose task demands such as setting goals to guide efforts, deciding a course of action, evaluating progress, and celebrating small achievements in route to the attainment of one’s goals. Such benchmarks may be used in multiple areas for students to self-manage anxiety and reframe productive struggle in the classroom. To understand the functionality of self-efficacy, what must be objectively considered are the cognitive mechanisms, which serve as the foundation of behavior change.

To the degree that students are developing, self-reflection constantly occurs between the two indexes of individual efficacy and group efficacy. For example, if a star player were on the front line, a player would judge the efficacy of the team on the basis of the star player’s strength and their own. Consequently, the most organic source of information for the perception of self is social comparison (Britner & Pajares, 2006). Learners consider their sex, age, race, previous successes/failures, and reflected appraisals to evaluate their capability to attain particular outcomes, which are the contributing elements that formulate student self-concept. In fact, self-concept is a misnomer; there is little “*self*” involved in its formation. The milieu communicates (explicit and implicit) messages regarding acceptable behaviors and possibilities of adolescents.

Therefore, the middle school adolescent learns to evaluate the index of self and the group to determine personal limitations. In further consideration, Bandura (2006) speaks to this interdependent nature of the complexity of the two indexes: the individual or the group. Students within a classroom are not monolithic in the unitary sense, but they are dissimilar to a team since individual students’ progress does not impact the test scores of other learners. Analogous to teams, however, learners in the classroom represent varied cognitive abilities to be valued in the learning environment. While group efficacy and individual efficacy are moderately correlated, group performance is predictive when analyzing the self-perceptions of group members in comparison to the greater group.

Boaler (2019) argues current educational practice forms barriers through tracking, representing a fixed regime. Tracking is intended to help schools meet the varying needs of students by providing low-ability students the level of instruction needed for their learning through homogenous grouping (Davis-Powell, 2020). With this level of instruction, teachers can easily plan lessons for students without making the lesson any more challenging or engaging. Perhaps, the benefits of tracking predominately rest on the ease of instructional planning versus the growth of students. One of

the adverse effects of planning is the rarity of heterogeneous grouping, which would allow for differential growth rates.

When students are placed on a track, assumptions are made about students' abilities, social interaction beyond the classroom is limited, and White and Asian students typically benefit from gifted and talented tracks (Davis-Powell, 2020; Boaler, 2019). To that end, tracking is often permanent and fails to compensate for differentiated levels of growth (Hallinan, 1994). Consequently, students in low-ability classes never catch up with their peers. In fact, researchers found that 88 percent of students who were placed on a track remained on the track for the rest of their academic careers (Boaler, 2019). Growth is nearly impossible for students in low-ability groups. When placed in tracks, students may create assumptions about their potential levels of achievement, considering both personal and group efficacy. Regardless of where students are placed, however, it is incumbent of educators to remain sensitive to the growth.

Deflating Limiting Self-Concepts

Fortunately, the self-concept is malleable and can be changed over time. Previous research findings present a range of specific tasks to better inform teacher dispositions that may yield significant impact on the self-concepts of learners. In the absence of a framework for the enhancement of self-concepts, Lee (2020) presents the CARE Theory of Self-Concept Enhancement. The four improved domains of CARE are as follows:

1. Cultural Relevance and Inclusion – The teacher sees the culture of students as an asset and intentionally invites their culture to the center of the lesson. Also, the learning environment consists of pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically.
2. Affirmations & Advocacy – The teacher celebrates of students' progress and affirmations regarding the individual qualities contribute to healthier self-images. In advocacy of students, the teacher intentionally intervenes to remove barriers, which hinder the growth of students – even if that is their own self-perceptions.
3. Relationship Building - The most significant motivator for such students is relationship, which serves as a prerequisite for learning. The foundation for relationships is trust, which is the variable that reduces complexity and increases predictability.
4. Expectations Unyielded - Every student's needs are unique. Our expectations should be clear, allowing all students access to learning outcomes. However, teachers should also expect mistakes and respond in a manner that supports students correcting their errors and making more.

For the sake of this article, I seek to focus on the two domain that specifically speak to teacher expectations of students and provide strategies to encourage productive struggle in the classroom environment: *Affirmations & Advocacy* and

Expectations Unyielded. In the next section of this paper, the two domains will be discussed with recommendations for classroom practice.

Affirmations & Advocacy

Affirmations are positive words used by teachers to celebrate the progress of students and encourage productive struggle. This is important to the classroom environment as learning requires vulnerability. Affirmations are observable during instruction as simple as giving positive messages to students who may lack self-belief and offering encouragement during struggle. As a result, students should know and feel safe in that the tools they bring to the learning process are adequate. Therefore, when observing behaviors related to perseverance, teachers should applaud the behavior but avoid terms of judgment such as “you’re so smart” or broad accolades such as “good job” (Branden, 1994). Students will rely on the teacher to ascribe value versus reflecting on their progress in achieving said goal. Here are some practical strategies for implementation of the *Affirmations & Advocacy* domain:

- Take time to learn the strengths of students rather than making judgments about what they do not have (Boutte, 2015).
- Focus on mastery of skills versus grades (Delpit, 2006).
- Publicly and genuinely announce students' success.
- Recognize areas of strength in each learner and share it frequently to combat negative thinking (Jennings, 2018).
- Celebrate students just as loudly as you correct them; constant correction without positive reinforcement sends the message “you are wrong.”

Expectations Unyielded

“Sometimes you have to believe that others say about your potential until you have the capacity to believe it for yourself” – Dr. Thomas Turner

On the first days of class, the learner consults their self-concepts through personal reflection to decide their grade by the end of the course. The idea of the ending grade reflects their personal expectations for their performance.

Consequently, the expectation of the teacher must exceed the students' expectations in efforts to increase their potential outcomes. Prior to providing strategies to raise the expectation of students in the classroom, it is important to examine one of the primary reasons while expectations are lowered for some students: a self-fulfilling prophecy. Gage and Lierheimer (2012) define self-fulfilling prophecy as an outcome of labeling for students, which acts as a determinant of behavior and academic performance. These labels may be based on race, ethnicity, gender, previous performance, tracking, and socio-economic status. Using the context or situation as a criterion for which students will experience success, teachers may formulate an inaccurate definition of the context and evoke them to become true (Lee, 2018). Interestingly, teacher

expectations of students are revealed in the opportunities we give to students (Education Commission of the States, 2012). If students are to raise expectations for themselves, we must focus on ways in which teachers can challenge their personal limitations. Here are some practical strategies for implementation of the *Expectations Unyielded* domain:

- Address/recognize personal biases and stereotypes that create inequitable learning environments. The teacher must engage in self-reflection to determine how their bias may be projected onto students.
- Use the rational emotive theory (RET) to dispute their irrational beliefs (Ellis, 1975). This theory questions the validity of students' reasoning as it relates to their decisions and self-talk.
- Do not allow students to turn in poor work that does not demonstrate their best efforts conceptually and intellectually. Giving up is easier than persevering. They should not be allowed to give up on their work nor themselves; aim for mastery.
- Use scaffolding to build on what students know in order to arrive at what they do not know (Benson, 1997).

Conclusion

“The leaders must believe in the potentiality of the people, whom they cannot treat as mere objects of their own action; they must believe that the people are capable of participating in the pursuit of liberation” (Freire, 2000, p. 169).

As stated by Brazilian philosopher, Paulo Freire, the liberation of students' minds is vested in the skill of the educator who inspires students to challenge their sense of self. Students may enter the classroom with a limited self-concept, which restricts access to higher levels of achievement. As mentioned in previous sections, if students do not perceive themselves as capable, they will likely decline opportunities that intimidate the self-belief. However, research supports the notion that there is enormous opportunity for growth, as the brains of students will be changing every day of school (Jensen, 2009). Learning can only happen when students are vulnerable within the learning environment and trust that their mistakes are only steps towards the production of anticipated outcomes (Boaler, 2019). This requires educators to create redefining moments for students to experience struggle in a safe environment that ultimately encourages students to remove personal limitations. I suggest that a change in self-concept represents a change in mindset. When teachers are critical about ways they respond to negative, limiting self-concepts, students may conquer breakthroughs in learning. Only then can we unlock the potential of students' learning outcomes and make real the catchphrase: No cap!

This requires educators to create redefining moments for students to experience struggle in a safe environment that ultimately encourages students to remove personal limitations.

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Take a P.A.U.S.E. for Student Success

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Abstract: Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our middle level students and teachers have suffered both great stress and loss. This loss and stress can result in the acting out behavior of students whose emotional maturity may not be fully able to cope. One middle school cancelled in-person classes in an attempt to ameliorate behavior issues. This article will examine the causes of the anti-social behavior and offer suggestions on the social-emotional health of both students and teachers. Strategies and resources will be listed in an effort to provide support to educators.

Keywords: COVID-19, social-emotional health, strategies, resilience

Introduction

Just prior to Thanksgiving, a middle school outside of Portland, Oregon cancelled all in-person classes and sent the students home to resume virtual classes. Why would this be done when the goal is to get school operations back to normal? The cancellation was not due to an increase in COVID-19 cases, but to an increase in anti-social behavior.

While it would seem counterintuitive to send students home, thereby removing them from the opportunity to participate in social activities, it appears the school administration found it necessary to restart the school year. Was it that the staff was not prepared for the students who had one year less of socialization and maturity, or were the students themselves not prepared? Do we have a different kind of student coming back to our schools and what are the long-term implications for the missing year of socialization? The school took a pause from the normal operation to try and find out.

What was the impact of both the pandemic and the interruption of the normal flow of the academic year? What do our students and teachers need now? To understand this situation and discuss possible ways to alleviate the impact of this lost year, perhaps it is a good idea to actually take a pause (P.A.U.S.E.) as well. This article will look at ways to: (P) Plan for more social and emotional learning, (A) Accept what is happening in our schools, (U) Understand how teachers and students need to allow for their own social emotional health, (S) Strategize ways to help students learn social skills, and

finally (E) Evaluate methods to help our students and teachers improve their emotional health.

Pausing to Help Our Students

Stopping academic work to help students with their social-emotional health is essential.

While there is great pressure to just carry on so that lessons and assessments associated with learning can be met, it is like the proverbial telling the farmer he needs to build a fence and the farmer responds, "I can't take time to build a fence, I am too busy chasing the cows." We cannot change the last year and a half, and we don't know what variations of the virus and/or school schedules await us, but we can and must help our students learn the skills to deal with our current and future situation. The superintendent of Reynolds Middle School was absolutely right in recognizing that "the time out of school has had an impact on student and staff well-being" (Miller, 2021, para 5).

Plan

Both the school and the teachers at the above-mentioned middle school recognized the changes in their students and the need to make plans to meet their social-emotional health needs. Reynolds Middle School also had concerns about school safety. The superintendent Danna Diaz says they want to make sure that the "... school had the necessary social-emotional supports and safety protocols in place to provide a safe learning environment for all students" (Miller, 2021, para 4). Their plan is to work with the staff and the union to include "... training for teachers to help students reflect on what's going on at the school, how to change the school culture, and teaching students emotional regulation skills" (Miller, 2021, para 18).

The time away impacted teachers as well. It is important that teachers plan for their own social-emotional health, to utilize the skills that they already possess or learn new skills, and even more important, that they include social-emotional activities in their weekly lesson plans, if not their daily lesson plans. These plans should include lesson segments to help students with their social-emotional health skills that they can learn to use for the rest of their lives. Many of these suggestions and skills will be addressed in the following sections.

Accept

It can be tempting for one entity in education to blame the other for students' lack of progress. Teachers blame previous teachers, parents, and often administrators, while administrators blame teachers and parents, and parents blame teachers and administrators. This is inherent in our system, but our current problem is actually outside the normal blame game as our students not only lost a year of normal school life, but their lives in general were drastically changed. These stress producing events can have impact on all students. While some students may have missed the entire year of in-person class, or

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only part of the year, the events both inside and outside the school had major implications for their well-being. We can't return to normal as if nothing happened. We cannot pretend that these events did not impact our middle level students or ignore that our students are coming to us missing normal development of social skills. Both teachers and students suffered stress and loss during the pandemic. According to Dr. Caitlin Stanaway (2020), the first four stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, and depression. The final stage of dealing with grief is accepting. In a chart Dr. Stanaway lists what acceptance can feel like and what it looks like which includes items like: "mindful behaviors, engaging with reality as it actually is,... adapting, coping, responding skillfully." In essence, educators need to accept the reality as it is and to respond with realistic expectations and practical skills.

Understand

Taking a pause to understand the situation would help meet one of the Essential Attributes of a successful middle school which is Responsiveness. In *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe*, Bishop & Harrison (2021), advocate "using the distinctive nature and identities of young adolescents as the foundation upon which all decisions about school are made" (p. 8). And one of the most distinctive traits of young adolescents is that their brains and emotional skill sets are not done maturing. In an interview for a PBS Frontline special on the teenage brain, Jay Giedd, the neuroscientist who was one of the first to study long term changes in the development of the brain states, "It is sort of unfair to expect teens to have adult levels of maturity when their brain are not done being built" (PBS, 2002, para 6). Furthermore, one of the characteristics of a successful middle school is: "School safety is addressed proactively, justly, and thoughtfully" (Bishop & Harrison, 2021, p. 9). Taking a pause to train teachers on understanding these new students and strategies to help them is one way to meet this characteristic.

During the pandemic our students were being isolated from friends and family members, including grandparents, but also bombarded by dire news of the pandemic. In addition, many of our students may have either had a family member who was gravely ill or passed away. In short, our students suffered a loss. Actually, they suffered many losses. They lost a year of their education, they lost a year of learning social skills, and they lost a year of normal school experience. With any loss comes grief and perhaps what we are seeing is the normal process of healing from grief. Dr. Stanaway (2020) lists anger and depression as two of the stages we all experience when dealing with loss and grief. The characteristics of the anger stage include irritability, being aggressive, and getting into argument or physical fights. Many adolescents, especially our population of early adolescents, may not have the skill set or the emotional maturity to handle these losses; we actually should not be surprised by this acting out behavior that was discussed in Reynolds Middle School.

Strategize

The human need for social encounters was restricted because of the time away from school and the shelter requirement

required by governmental agencies. The social skills that the students normally learn and practice have been delayed. It is possible that our 12 and 13 year old students are now entering the 7th grade with only 5th grade social skills. If so, we need to strategize how to bridge the gap.

Relationship building in one of the most important factors in successful schools. Jensen (2009) lists relationships as one of the five important school-wide success factors. He discusses four types of relationships: peer-to-peer, student-to-teacher, caregiver-to-student, and even staff-to-staff. School administrators should implement strategies for building strong relationships with their staff and help the staff build strong supportive relationships with their students and colleagues. One way to discuss these relationships is with TSRQ, (Teacher-Student Relationship Quality). Pastore and Luder (2021) discuss how crucial this relationship is: "Research has shown the importance of emotional aspects as a mark of quality of teacher-student relationships, recognizing them as strong predictors for better achievement, compared to professional and subject-related aspects of teaching" (para 1). Nieto and Bode (2018) also discuss TSRQ and how important it is (p. 219). They also say that an essential component in promoting student learning is an emphasis on care (p. 216). This includes three factors: Caring Relationships, Hope, and Healing.

Creating these relationships is vital and it takes time to teach the necessary skills. PBIS World suggests that if the student has poor peer-to-peer relationships that they should be taught coping skill, social skills, relationship skills, and conflict management skills. For most of my career I have taught that a successful classroom must have three foundations: Classroom Unity, Team Spirit, and Individual Worth. Pre-service teachers, and even experienced teachers, all hope before the beginning of each school year that they have good classrooms where the students feel that they belong and there exists a sense of unity. However, simply hoping that a class will come together on its own rarely manifests itself.

There are hundreds of activities that will help build class unity through peer-to-peer and student-teacher relationships. These strategies can vary in both time and depth, and it is always best to start with quick and easy and less revealing activities and do more complicated and in-depth activities later and throughout the year. For example, calling roll is necessary but can be utilized to build class unity. Each day roll is called, students can be asked an interest question that will help them learn more about each other. Examples could include sharing one's favorite sport/team, music/musician, season, or vacation spot. Utilizing these and other interpersonal activities will build friendships and connections. These activities also allow for the teaching of differences and how students should respect and honor the likes and dislikes of their classmates. While the teacher should always model these strategies by also sharing information, a second strategy to create student-teacher relationships is through an interest survey that is shared only between teacher and student. The questions on the survey can include other inquiries on the individual student's interests. With this information the teacher can proactively

share with individuals to build stronger connections and let the student know that the teacher cares about them since the teacher is using their specific answers in interactions with each student.

The teaching of social skills is not only important; it fulfills a vital need in our students. Jensen (2009) states that there are only six hard-wired emotion: sadness, joy, disgust, anger, surprise, and fear. All other emotions like empathy, humility, and gratitude must be explicitly taught and learned (p. 18). The T-Square strategy is a powerful technique that uses looks-like and sound-like words/phrases/image in a visual learning chart. The desired social skill is listed at the top of the T. On one side of the vertical line above the horizontal line the label “looks like” is placed and on the other side, “sounds like” is written. Students then offer what each skill or emotion should look like or sound like. For example, the ability to encourage others is a great social skill. So asking students, “What does encouragement look like?” and “What does encouragement sound like?” will provide a visual representation and reminder of what students should say and do for each other to encourage them.

Another way to teach social skills is through student teams. Simply placing students in groups does not inherently teach social skills and teachers should no longer assume that students come to class with these skills. In fact, putting students in groups without the teaching of social skills may actually reduce team spirit. Conflict can break out if students don’t have the necessary social skills to work together or the conflict management skills to solve relationship issues. Using Student Team Achievement Division teams, otherwise known as STAD teams, is a successful way to put students into cooperative/competitive teams. Research on this version of cooperative learning has consistently shown academic improvement (Slavin, 1995). This cooperative strategy was designed to break down barriers between group members and create a cohesive team atmosphere. This is a very structured strategy where the teacher assigns group members based upon the characteristics of the student population in the classroom, but more importantly after getting to know their students well, both their personality and their academic ability. The teams are balanced so they can fairly compete in non-stressful academic activities. In order to facilitate even more social skills, each team picks officers to help the team function. They establish a leader, vice-leader, recorder, and speaker, but they also choose a name for the team and design a silent cheer to be used when they finish an assignment or a competitive activity. Another important function of the STAD teams is the generation of both team and individual goals.

Evaluate

The last part of taking a pause is to evaluate ways to help improve emotional health and well-being. Daniel Goldberg first discussed the idea of Emotional Quotient a number of years ago and this is perhaps even more important in our world as it exists today. There are two aspects of emotional health in our schools, that of the emotional health of our teachers and the emotional health of our students.

There is much discussion of mindfulness and emotional health of our students, but before an educator can plan for and initiate teaching emotional skills for our students, educators should address their own emotional health. The very same factors that are facing our students – stress, fear, change, and loss – also take a toll on educators. The key for both educators and students is the ability to cultivate and improve one’s own resilience. In the book *Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators* (2018), Aguilar wrote that resilience is cultivated between the moment something happens and the response. She states, “Simply put, resilience is how we weather the storms in our lives and rebound after something difficult” (p. 2). The events occurring over the last 18 months and continuing into the next year constitute a major storm. In her 10 elements of the Resilience Manifesto, Aguilar (2018) states that sixth element is, “To help children build their emotional intelligence and resilience, we must simultaneously tend to our own emotional intelligence and resilience” (p. 19). This very powerful book provides a one-year sequence of multiple ideas and activities to do each month that can be started at any time. At Winthrop University, many education professors participated in a book club format for this book and found it very helpful, myself included.

Many of the concepts and activities in the Aguilar book can translate directly into the classroom. However, this last section will provide other resources and tips on how to help students with their own emotional strength and resilience. Dore and McMurtrie (2021) in their book *Our Diverse Middle School Students: A Guide for Equitable and Responsive Teaching* state that the student’s self-esteem and self-concept are tied directly to their emotional health. And one of the biggest causes of health issues is in fact stress. Jensen (2009) says that chronic stress “generates a weaker signal, handles less blood flow, processes less oxygen, and extends fewer branches to nearby cells” (p. 25). Jensen asserts that stress shrinks neurons in the frontal lobe which is the area that is responsible for judgement, planning and impulsivity (p. 25). Dore and McMurtrie (2021) state, “Middle-level students today, because of conditions not of their own making, find themselves dealing with stress not even considered by their age group a few years ago” (p. 71).

A second book study at the Winthrop College of Education was a book by Dianne Maroney (2018) called the *Imagine Project: Empowering Kids to Rise Above Drama, Trauma, and Stress* and it based upon developing emotional strength and resilience through therapeutic writing using the prompt “imagine”. We found the book and the process to be very empowering and the professors will be sharing this resource with our teacher education candidates.

Another skill for helping students manage their own social and emotional skills are the techniques of self-monitoring, self-evaluation and self-management. Weinstein (2015) says “the goal of self-management is to help students to learn to regulate their own behavior” (p. 317). The IRIS Center (2021), a project of the Peabody College at Vanderbilt, is an amazing resource for many topics but in their module called *SOS: Helping Students Become Independent Learners* there is

information on how students can become more independent through self-monitoring, self-instruction, self-reinforcement, and goal setting.

Many teachers are already using social-emotional strategies. One middle school teacher in South Carolina has a chart by the door asking students how they want to be greeted. Do they want a high-five, an elbow bump, a secret handshake, or just a smile? Many teachers have students indicate how they are doing using the reactions settings if they are on-line. And many teachers have taken this strategy to the in-person classroom. Other teachers will have students use hand signs using a number system on how they are feeling with one finger being not so good to five fingers representing that they are great. Perhaps when we take a pause to assess our students' health, we should also take the time to share good ideas like these with colleagues. It is something that must be planned.

Conclusion

The importance of helping students with their social-emotional well-being was recognized before COVID-19 interrupted our school year(s). Now it is crucial. In many ways the educational world was getting prepared and even had a head start. One of the many skills listed for social emotional health is mindfulness and one of the best ways to achieve this is to take a moment to just be quiet; in other words, to take a pause. So while schools might want to literally take a pause to provide for the health and safety of our schools, we should also take a pause to help ourselves.

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Movement for a Purpose: The Middle School Classroom and Student Engagement

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Abstract: When students reach adolescence, they begin to lose their excitement for learning and student behavior declines. Many students lose interest in their schoolwork because too many educators are still relying on the traditional classroom model. Research evidence reminds middle school educators why movement is an essential physical and emotional component of adolescent learning and development. The aim of this article is to remove the negative or stressful stigma many educators have about movement in the classroom and provide practical strategies to allow students to move each day.

Keywords: adolescent development, movement, strategies, classroom management

Introduction

Recently I observed a classroom rule that caused me to question the traditional classroom model. In this particular observation, the teacher indicated a rule that read, “Movement only for a Purpose: Kleenex, sharpen pencil, emergencies.” This anecdotal experience presents an interesting point on the impact that traditional rules could have on a student’s experience. Thus, my immediate thought was, what if movement had a purpose other than a classroom procedure? Instead, teachers could redefine the movement for a purpose, as a movement that actually works to enhance learning and student engagement within the classroom.

When we think of a traditional classroom and expectations the first rules that come to mind are: remain in your seat, stay quiet, and stay focused. The problem is that these three things don’t go hand in hand. It can be especially difficult for adolescents to follow the traditional rules that require them to sit still and remain quiet for an entire class. Research shows the traditional classroom model is no longer effective for students. A recent survey conducted by Gallup (Brenneman, 2016), found that only half of the adolescent participants within the study reported feeling actively engaged in school. Sadly, about a fifth of the participants reported that they were completely disengaged.

In addition to students not being engaged in class there has been research conducted to analyze the impact that age has on engagement. In a recent study, Brenneman (2016) found that as students’ age increases, their engagement in class decreases. Knowing this, some middle school teachers find that their role has become to help engage students and encourage the enjoyment of learning. One reason students lose interest in learning is due to the unrealistic expectations in the classroom. As students progress in school they typically experience less time for physical activity and hands on learning. In the book *How to Deal with Teenage Learning Fatigue* (Philip, 2007), the author identifies students’ inability to focus or be engaged in a classroom with less physical activity as learning fatigue. The author suggests that if we implement more fun and engaging activities into the classroom teachers could help avoid learning fatigue.

Why Movement Matters

Students are receiving less time to move than ever. Specifically, adolescent students have a decrease in recess time and daily physical education. While recess and physical education play critical roles in student learning, classroom teachers can also incorporate movement in to their daily classroom routine. Utilizing movement in the classroom could be especially beneficial for students in middle school. Research shows that middle school students typically can stay focused on a task for about 10-12 minutes (Vawter, 2009). The benefit to allowing students to move more frequently in the classroom is that it gives them the opportunity to hit the reset button and process their learning. When teachers implement planned movement activities into the classroom, they are supporting a child’s ability to relieve built up stress and promoting the use of relaxation strategies (Boswell, Boni and Mentzer, 1995). Some research has even found that exercise can be a catalyst to help with the growth of an individual’s brain (Jensen, 2005). Overall, when students are not given enough opportunity to exercise throughout the day it is actually hindering the student’s ability to learn within the classroom (Jensen, 2005).

Strategies for Using Movement in the Classroom

As a 6th grade science teacher I learned quickly that my students are not able to sit still for long. Instead of allowing this to be an obstacle I decided to use it to my advantage by asking myself, how can I use my student’s energy to enhance learning in my classroom? Below are a few strategies I use to keep students moving daily.

Station Activities

Station activities are efficient and effective, especially in a science classroom. Utilizing stations to structure the class allows students to stand and move frequently while also allowing time for a variety of activities. Additionally, they provide an opportunity for a variety of learners to be

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successful and they implement natural reinforcement. When splitting students up into stations, students are assigned groups and move from station to station about every eight to ten minutes, depending on the activity. The teacher sets up a classroom timer on the screen, to provide a visual aid to students so that they can follow along and self-pace their group to complete each activity. It is important that students stay within smaller groups, and group numbers do not exceed four to five students. Additionally, stations are meant to be flexible and provide students with the choice to sit or stand throughout the rotations. In general, the more flexibility that students have when in stations the better it is for incorporating movement with a purpose into the classroom.

Gallery Walks

Gallery walks can be used as an introduction activity, vocabulary practice, or reflection activity. In this activity, teachers post pictures around the classroom or hallway and allow students to visit each picture to complete the activity. For example, I used a gallery walk for reading weather maps. Students had 15 minutes to visit ten weather maps and predict the weather in ten different locations. When students are walking around the gallery they should have a worksheet to help guide them throughout the activity. Typically, Gallery walks are individual work for students, so the room is usually quiet. However, the activity is still implementing structured movement for students as they are up and moving around to complete their work.

Act it Out Vocabulary

I have found that this activity is a student favorite. To start the activity, you choose one student from the class to be “it”. This student holds a vocabulary word on their head or the teacher displays it behind them on the board. The remainder of the students in the classroom act out the term silently. The student has 30 seconds to guess the word. This can be done as a whole class or small groups with two to three students. This activity is great for test review or a closure activity in the last five minutes of class. This helps students recall vocabulary by using kinesthetic learning to help students with memorization of specific key words or concepts.

Walking Notes

When teachers have expectations that students should sit for an entire 60-minute class period and take notes, it is unrealistic. Instead of practicing traditional note-taking in my classroom, I began walking notes. This takes no more prep-time for teachers than preparing a PowerPoint. The teacher prints out PowerPoint slides and hangs them around the room. Students walk around to each slide and take notes from the slide. To check for understanding the slide usually has a question related to the material. Students can be given up to three minutes per slide to take notes and then they rotate to the next PowerPoint slide hanging on the wall. While this is allowing movement, this is not a collaboration activity. In this activity, students are expected to work independently. When using walking notes, it is most helpful for the students when teachers provide guided notes. Guided notes often have bullet points or fill in the blanks for students to complete that are

related to the slide. During the last 15 minutes the class comes together to discuss the material as an entire class. This can be done by playing a review game, discussing the check for understanding questions, or by showing a video.

Seat Swap

This is a quick activity that teachers can use when the lesson that is planned for the day, does not include a lot of movement. In my classroom, I include a seat swap slide in a PowerPoint when the lesson includes a lot of material or note taking. In this activity, students have five seconds to gather their materials. Once they have their materials, the teacher plays a fun song for about 20 seconds. At which point, students can rotate around their lab table and find a new seat (it should be noted that students stay within their group, to help with classroom structure). All students must be seated when the music stops and then class continues. Even though this a quick activity, it gets students up and moving around the classroom.

Flexible Seating

When students are working individually, a strategy I use to encourage some movement and flexibility in the learning environment, is that I give students the opportunity to choose their work space. Some teachers may choose to have carpets or couches in their classroom for flexible seating. However, you can also use flexible seating without new furniture in the classroom. I have found that some students work better standing up, some sitting on the floor, some just want to move to a table that isn't a desk. Flexible seating is used for individual worktime. Some of the expectations that teachers can provide to their students for flexible seating include: pick a seat that helps you focus, use each seat appropriately, be respectful of others in the classroom, work individually, and the teacher has the right to move you at any time. In my classroom, I have noticed that students enjoy flexible seating because of the freedom they have. Using this activity, flexible seating, shows students that learning can be comfortable, and they have some choices in their learning experience.

Setting Boundaries: Classroom Management

The purpose of movement is meant to enhance instruction not distract students. While movement adds a functional activity into the classroom, boundaries and expectations must be set to ensure effectiveness.

Timing is Everything

Chunking is key to effectively incorporating movement into the classroom. As previously mentioned, middle school students often can only focus on a single task for about 12 minutes. Thus, teachers should try to plan lessons in about 15 minute chunks with incorporating movement in between each lesson. As a middle school teacher, I plan my lessons with timers on every few slides to help with the flow of chunking lessons. For example, use a 20-second timer for students to complete a seat swap; then, have students read an article for five minutes at each station, and continue with this for several stations. Providing specific times for students shows them that the movement is not play time, but a part of instruction.

Structure in the activity helps students remain focused and not lose sight of the purpose in the lesson.

Model, Practice, Repeat

Movement is not common in many classrooms, which means students may have not experienced the activities listed above. Thus, in order for students to understand them, they must be practiced and modeled frequently at the beginning of the school year. For example, students will not remain quiet in walking notes the first time and teachers should be patient with their students. So, the teacher may have to demonstrate walking notes or complete them as a class and then in pairs before students can work independently. It is important that teachers model each activity, have the student's practice, knowing they may make a mistake, and repeat this as often as needed.

Be Consistent

So, knowing all this information teachers should understand that, movement matters! Utilizing movement within daily lesson plans is a great way to manage movement in your classroom. When movement is a part of students' daily routine it becomes more natural to them. It is important to note that movement should not be used as an incentive. Instead, movement should be a consistent normed activity that is completed that your students look forward to and start to enjoy learning.

Conclusion

When movement is used to help organize the classroom, the environment becomes a student-centered classroom. As educators, it is our job to create learning environments that meet the needs of students. Thus, allowing movement in the classroom meets the needs of all learners. Especially those that developmentally may need more opportunities to move around throughout the day. Movement provides opportunities for students to enjoy learning and become comfortable in the classroom. In my personal experience, movement in the classroom has increased excitement and decreased behavior problems. The activities highlighted in this article are only some ways that teachers can use movement in the classroom. It is encouraged that teachers get creative and use movement in a way that is most appropriate for their classroom. If movement in the middle school classroom becomes the new standard, I believe we will see more positive results with academic and behavioral concerns.

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Connecting Weirdness and Wonder to Mathematics

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Abstract: Middle school students are weird and wonderful. Why not bring some of that weirdness and wonder into the mathematics classroom? Effective teachers of mathematics can create a culture of engagement, curiosity, and collaboration in mathematics instruction by presenting “weird” problems (as opposed to word problems) and giving students opportunities to explore their wonderings. Inspired by “the bizarreness effect,” the problems presented here are infused with humor and designed to intrigue young adolescents.

Keywords: middle school, mathematics, problem solving, the bizarreness effect, humor, engagement, productive struggle

Introduction

Middle school students are weird and wonderful. Why not bring some of that weirdness and wonder into the middle school mathematics classroom? Effective teachers of mathematics can create a culture of engagement, curiosity, and collaboration in mathematics instruction by presenting “weird” problems (not merely “word” problems) and giving students opportunities to explore their wonderings. In this article, “dare to be weird” meets “productive struggle.” Our goal is to share novel problem solving activities designed to intrigue young adolescents.

The Nature of Adolescence

Adolescence is a unique time in the human lifespan. Young people ages 10-15 experience dramatic changes in physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Physical development refers to biological factors such as body weight and proportion, gross and fine motor skills, structural refinement in the brain, and hormonal changes. From a physical standpoint, rapid and uneven growth can lead to

fatigue and restlessness in the classroom. Cognitive development refers to the ability to think, reason, and solve problems. During the middle school years, students develop increasingly complex ways of thinking and their thinking begins to shift from concrete to abstract reasoning. They also become more skilled in metacognition, or thinking about thinking. Young adolescents are now capable of understanding irony and subtle humor.

As middle school students are gaining physical and cognitive maturity, their social skills are burgeoning. Through peer interaction, adolescents learn about reciprocity of relationships; adolescents explore the principles of fairness and justice by working through disagreements with peers.

Emotional development refers to the ability to regulate one’s own behavior and respond to others’ emotions with sensitivity. Young adolescents experience some of the most profound emotional changes in the lifespan and have an intense need to belong and fit in. They need to feel loved, appreciated, cared for, and respected. According to the Association for Middle Level Education, successful middle schools respect and value young adolescents (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). Additionally, middle level educators must be specifically prepared to teach this age group and possess a breadth and depth of content area knowledge (Bishop & Harrison, 2021).

We understand that young adolescents are bright and curious. They respond well to structure and consistency, but they also crave novelty and the opportunity to make choices as they explore their identities. It is imperative that teachers stretch the curriculum to make explicit connections to their students’ interests. A powerful way to meet the unique developmental needs of young adolescents is to offer opportunities for collaborative problem solving using unusual topics that appeal to this unique age group.

Problem Solving in Mathematics

The importance of problem-solving in learning mathematics stems from the belief that mathematics is primarily about reasoning, as opposed to repeating a set of memorized, rehearsed procedures. Students acquire their understanding of mathematics and develop problem-solving skills as a result of applying their knowledge in new situations, rather than being taught skills in isolation. Mathematics requires not only computational skills but also the ability to think and reason mathematically in order to solve new problems. Problem-solving thus allows students to transfer what they have already learned to unfamiliar situations (Kurz & Bartholomew, 2012).

In his seminal work, Pólya (1945) published a set of four principles of problem-solving to support teachers in helping their students. He argued that problem-solving is not linear but rather a complex, interactive process. Students move backward and forward between and across Pólya’s phases to

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1) understand and explore the problem; 2) find a strategy; 3) use the strategy to solve the problem; and 4) look back and reflect on the solution. Schoenfeld (1985, 2017) emphasizes the value in learning to think mathematically. Ahmed (1987) established that effective problems are accessible and extendable; allow individuals to make decisions; promote discussion and communication; encourage originality and invention; encourage “what if?” and “what if not?” questions; and contain an element of surprise.

The Bizarreness Effect

Would you rather have a toaster for a head or a cactus for a spine? Would you rather sound like a duck or swim like a squid? What would happen if you never cut your toenails? How would our view of space change if the moon was actually made of cheese? If you could transport one furious elephant into any point in history, where would you put it? If you died and had to choose one place to haunt for the rest of eternity, where would you choose to haunt? These are the kinds of questions that will capture the attention and interest of our middle school students.

Problems are most effective for young adolescents when they contain unusual or memorable content. Einstein, McDaniel, & Lackey (1989) describe the “bizarreness effect.” They found that unusual information is generally recalled better than common information. A similar phenomenon occurs in psychology called contextual distinctiveness, which refers to the ability to better recall and remember events or items that are unusual, uncommon, and distinct. Landrum, Brakke, & McCarthy (2019) contend that if a teacher creates intrigue or an unusual outcome to a problem, students are more likely to remember the information. Waddill & McDaniel (1998) found that introducing bizarre or unusual information results in better recall because unusual content elicits different encoding processes.

Humor has also been found to enhance lecture recall (Kaplan and Pascoe, 1977). In a recent study, Van Dooren et. al (2019) conducted a study with 148 sixth graders and found humor to be an effective tool to build a bridge between mathematics and real world problem solving. These types of questions may also help relieve some math anxiety. In the *Math Curse* (2009), Scieszka and Smith ask humorous questions with a touch of relevancy from the perspective of a student who reluctantly sees everything as a math problem. For example, “The Mississippi River is about 4,000 kilometers long. An M&M is about 1 centimeter long. There are 100 centimeters in 1 meter, and 1000 meters in 1 kilometer. Estimate how many M&Ms it would take to measure the length of the Mississippi River” (p. 12).

Productive Struggle in Mathematics

“Weird questions” can prompt our students to engage in productive struggle. Productive struggle occurs when students think creatively, try different avenues towards solutions, exert effort and self-correct to attempt to solve problems (Granberg, 2016). From a neurological perspective, productive struggle leads to better learning due to the increased production of

white matter in students’ brains called myelin (Sriram, 2020). As myelin increases, brain signals travel faster and more efficiently.

Types of productive struggle may include confusion over getting started; carrying out a process but encountering an impasse; having difficulty explaining one’s work; and misconceptions that result in errors (Zeybek, 2016). To solve a challenging problem, students must engage in self-regulated learning (SRL), which theorists define as students’ ability to deliberately use cognitive and metacognitive processes to achieve a learning goal (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Models of SRL generally describe how students define the task, set goals, plan and enact strategies, and evaluate progress during an academic task. Munzar, Muis, Denton, & Losenno (2021) examined what happens when this process is interrupted because of an impasse: “Whether it be a gap between prior knowledge and the conceptual demands of the problem, a lack of motivation, attentional issues, or weak domain general problem-solving skills, students will likely experience an impasse when trying to solve a challenging problem” (p. 2). Munzar, Muis, Denton, & Losenno (2021) argue that impasse-related emotions play a critical role in learning tasks; as they unfold, they provide feedback to students in terms of how well they are comprehending the content and progressing through the task. Challenging problems force students to focus on what caused the impasse, which results in deeper learning.

Parents and teachers may show concern over the idea of productive struggle, thinking if students struggle excessively or never discover the answer, then they won’t reap the benefits. Studies suggest otherwise; productive failure contributes to student success on well-structured and higher-order thinking problems (Kapur, 2012). Several findings suggest that it may be “more productive to delay the addition of scaffolding until the student reaches an impasse—a form of failure—and is subsequently unable to generate an adequate way forward” (Kapur, 2012, p. 47).

The challenge for teachers is ensuring the problems are designed to support mathematics learning and are appropriate and challenging for all students. Teachers profoundly influence students’ perceptions of and approaches to struggle in the mathematics classroom. According to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2014), productive struggle is one of eight mathematical research-based teaching practices. In *Principles to Action*, a description of productive beliefs is shared: “An effective teacher provides students with appropriate challenge, encourages perseverance in solving problems, and supports productive struggle in learning mathematics” (n.p).

The problems need to be difficult enough to provide a challenge but not so difficult that students cannot succeed. A starting point for teachers “to encourage mathematics creativity may occur by prompting students to pay attention to their wonderings. . . [and to] capture their ideas and build on them” (Moore-Russo, Simmons, & Tulino, 2020, p. 131). In productive classrooms, students work on complex problems,

are encouraged to take risks, and can struggle and fail, yet still feel good about working on difficult problems (Boaler, 2016). Teachers can foster a classroom culture that values and promotes productive struggle by 1) providing students with challenging tasks that are accessible to all students; 2) establishing the expectation that everyone will persist when solving challenging mathematical tasks; and 3) prioritizing process over product.

Offering guidance to teachers, SanGiovanni, Katt, and Dykema (2020) provide six action steps for prompting and nurturing students' productive struggle before, during, and after mathematics lessons. A key to success is in the intentionality in planning and teaching. The research is clear: Educators do not need to lead passive learners through a narrow path to success or the "correct" answer in the most efficient manner (Kapur, 2012). Facing disequilibrium or a discrepancy is desirable—even necessary—for deep learning to occur. Temporary failures "invoke mechanisms and processes that lead to more differentiated and complex conceptual structures" (Kapur, 2011, p. 562). Assistance should only be offered after the learner has had an opportunity to wrestle with the problem. Teachers should emphasize that students are not expected to be able to solve the problem, but "to generate multiple representations and methods even if these do not lead to a successful solution" (p. 575).

Generating "Weird" Questions

So how can we design "weird" questions to intrigue and inspire our middle-level mathematics students? Below is a list of questions that build upon prior studies of the "bizarreness effect," contextual distinctiveness, and humor. We argue that this approach promotes student engagement and improves the encoding and recall of academic information, specifically mathematics concepts.

Weird Questions for Mathematics

- If your bed sheets had to be made of deli meat, how would you calculate the amount of meat you would need?
- We have just received word of an impending zombie apocalypse. How many people could we save if our classroom was designated as a shelter? How could we find out?
- What is the only number that has the same number of letters?
- Would you rather have 10 mg of gold or 1 gram of silver?
- Would you rather have your money double every day for a month or have it squared every day for a week?
- How many liters of Gatorade will fill a swimming pool?
- How many pennies would fit inside a wheelbarrow?
- If you could invent a new unit of measure, what would it be?
- How many pieces of dandruff would support your body weight?
- How many acres of cotton would you need to plant to make a million dollars?
- How long would it take you to travel from Valletta to St. Paul's Bay in Malta if you were riding a camel?
- If a Skittles candy measures 1 centimeter, how many Skittles would it take to measure across the Lake Murray

Dam if the dam measures 1.7 miles? How many calories would I eat if I ate the Skittles while I walked across the dam?

- In 2021, LeBron James won 4 championships and has a salary over 41 million dollars. In 1998, Michael Jordan's top salary was 33 million and he has won 6 championships. Who was the better basketball player - the GOAT?
- How does something as heavy as an airplane leave the ground and stay in the air?
- How can I use the Golden Ratio to prove that my friend's face is perfect?

Conclusion

We advocate using "weird problems" to connect mathematics content to young adolescent interests and kindle their curiosity. This strategy increases student engagement, promotes higher-order thinking, and provides opportunities for collaboration. Providing students with developmentally appropriate "weird" problems invokes inquiry and helps them actively construct their ideas about mathematics. As students explore their wonderings, they take risks, try new strategies, and give and receive feedback. They share a range of points of view and discuss different ways of solving a problem. They learn to test mathematical boundaries, explore mathematical ideas and relationships, and think creatively. Students apply, self-monitor, and adapt new mathematical knowledge to fresh situations and contexts. Moore-Russo, Simmons, & Tulino (2020) make an important distinction between exercises and problems: "Exercises are tasks for which the solution path, even if tedious and lengthy, is known, and problems are tasks for which the solution path [is] not immediately obvious" (p. 132). Teachers can use the "weird problems" approach as a best practice to empower students to explore, persist, and collaborate. The benefits are enormous as students struggle to make sense of the problem, learn to generate questions to get more information, apply mathematical reasoning, and persevere. The goal is to make math engaging, challenging, and fun.

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Closing the STEM Gap: A University, P-12 School District Partnership to Engage Sixth Grade Students in Integrated Computing Activities

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Abstract: This article describes how participating in a computing program positively impacted young adolescents from underrepresented populations in STEM attitude toward STEM and interest in STEM-related careers. Nineteen sixth-grade students attending a rural, Title I middle school participated in the study. Five computing lessons were taught by undergraduate interns majoring in computer science, middle-level mathematics and science teacher education, and secondary mathematics teacher education. Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data provide convincing evidence that students' attitudes toward STEM improved and interests in STEM-related careers increased because of participating in the computing program.

Keywords: STEM education, STEM education equity, underrepresented minorities in STEM, STEM attitude, STEM career interest, computing activities

Introduction

STEM education involves learning and teaching in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics using an interdisciplinary approach (Gonzalez and Kuenzi, 2012). In

STEM education, the four fields in question are adapted to the subject or one of the disciplines is focused on and the other fields are used as context to teach the subject of the field in focus (Moore et al., 2014). STEM education develops students' problem solving, critical thinking, and analytical thinking skills (Koyunlu Unlu, Dökme & Unlu, 2016) and seeks to create innovative individuals who possess an interdisciplinary point of view while approaching problems (Bybee, 2013; Clark and Button, 2011). Additionally, STEM education provides students an opportunity to engage with real-life problems and use questioning, problem solving, collaboration, and practical activities to find solutions, by focusing on student-centered education (Soylu, 2016).

One of the major purposes of STEM education is to encourage students to obtain careers in science, technology, mathematics, and engineering. For the past 30 years, research indicates that while the need for individuals employed in STEM-careers increases, the number of individuals interested in STEM-careers constantly decreases. An even greater national concern is the lack of underrepresented populations including women, African-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and individuals with disabilities entering STEM professions. A group is underrepresented in STEM when its numbers in each career are disproportionately lower than its numbers in the general population. According to the National Science Board Science and Engineering Indicators (2018), African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans continue to remain underrepresented in receiving science and engineering bachelor's degrees compared to their percentage of the population, (15%, 21% and 0.9%, respectively).

Research indicates that the STEM issue becomes prevalent during young adolescence as many students lose their interest in science and mathematics while enrolled in middle school (Museus, Palmer, Davis & Maramba, 2011; Turner & Ireson, 2010). In addition, youth generally determine career paths by the age of 13 (Tai et al., 2006; Bernstein et al., 2019; Shet & Tremblay, 2019). Therefore, if we are to increase the STEM-pipeline, educators must provide opportunities for middle school students to engage in STEM-based activities which will increase students interests in STEM disciplines and improve their interests in STEM-related careers.

The Partnership

The university, a Minority Serving Institution (MSI), received a grant funded by the Department of Energy (DOE) which allowed the university to establish a Minority Serving Institution Partnership Program (MSIPP). Facilitated by various consortiums, MSIPP's mission is to increase STEM participation of underrepresented minorities in educational and workforce opportunities throughout the United States. The grant initially established a three-way partnership between the

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funding agency, university, and a local P-12 school district. To facilitate the grant's goals, a second three-way partnership was developed between the university's Department of Computer Science, the university's School of Education, and the P-12 school district. The university partnership allowed undergraduate computer science and pre-service teacher education majors serving as interns to teach STEM-based computing activities to middle school students enrolled in the local P-12 school district.

The Computing Program

The semester-long computing program was facilitated by the researchers and nine undergraduate interns. The researchers consisted of a computer science professor with previous DOE experience and an education professor with experience as a high school science teacher and science instructional coach. Of the nine interns, three were computer science majors, three were secondary mathematics education majors, and three were middle-level mathematics and science education majors.

Prior to teaching the lessons, interns attended four professional development sessions facilitated by the researchers to enhance their pedagogical knowledge. Session topics included This We Believe, Sixth- Grade College and Career Ready Standards for mathematics and science, International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards, integrated curriculum, writing lesson plans, and classroom management. Once the professional development sessions ended, undergraduate students were divided into three groups with each group consisting of one student majoring in computer science and two students majoring in education. Each group of interns created a minimum of two integrated, engaging, hands-on computing lesson plans which were approved by the researchers prior to sixth-grade students participating in the computing program.

The computing program included eight interdisciplinary, engaging, hands-on activities aligned with the state's sixth-grade Computer Science and Digital Literacy Standards as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1
Computing Program Activities

Title of Activity	Computer Science and Digital Literacy Standards
Are You Safe?	Understand the risks and responsibilities of being a digital citizen.
Cyber War	Analyze the use of computing to solve relevant problems.
Cyberbullying	Understand the risks and responsibilities of being a digital citizen.
Introduction to Problem Solving	Design, evaluate, and modify simple algorithms.

Making Data and Sending Data	Analyze how data is collected with both computational and non-computational tools and processes.
Introduction to Problem Solving	Design, evaluate, and modify simple algorithms.
Making Data and Sending Data	Analyze how data is collected with both computational and non-computational tools and processes.
Introduction to Scratch	Examine how computing devices function.
Making Data and Graphing Data: Distance, Time, and Data	Analyze how data is collected with both computational and non-computational tools and processes.
Processing	Design, evaluate, and modify simple algorithms.

The purpose of the computing program was to determine how participating in computing activities increased sixth-grade students' interest in STEM and improved their attitudes toward STEM-related careers. To answer the research questions, students completed the Engagement Survey at the conclusion of each session, the STEM Semantics Survey at the culmination of the program and participated in a focus group conducted by the researchers. The research questions which guided the study were:

1. How does participation in a computing program affect students' attitude toward STEM?
2. How does participation in a computing program affect students' interest in STEM- related careers?
3. What is the experience of sixth-grade students participating in a computing program?

The Students

Nineteen sixth-grade students from underrepresented populations in STEM attending a public, rural, Title I middle school participated in the study. Of the 19 participants, 11 were male, eight were female, 17 were African-American, one was Latino, and one was Caucasian. The Caucasian student was female. The students attended a rural Southeastern middle school with an enrollment of 443 students in grades six through eight. Of the 443 students attending the school, 95% received free or reduced lunch and 1.6 % participated in the gifted and talented program.

Instruments for Data Collection

The Engagement Survey was designed to be completed by young adolescents ages 10-14 immediately after completing a science activity to investigate motivation and interest in STEM. The Engagement Survey is comprised of eight questions based on a 4-point Likert scale which includes three subscales: behavioral, cognitive, and affective. To answer each question, respondents reply YES (four), yes (three), no

(two), or NO (one). The survey provides an overall engagement score, a behavioral/cognitive score (questions four through eight), and an affective score (questions one through three).

The behavioral engagement subscale evaluates whether students are on or are off-task while completing the assigned activity. The cognitive engagement subscale measures whether students' thought processes and attention are directed towards meaningful processing of information involved in completing the assigned activity. The affective engagement subscale assesses whether students' emotions that occur as part of completing the assigned activity are positive and high arousal rather than negative and low arousal. Questions answered by respondents completing the Engagement Survey include: 1) "During this activity: Time went by quickly" (behavior); 2) "During this activity: I was focused on the things we were learning most of the time" (cognitive); and 3) "During this activity: I felt bored" (affective). The Engagement Scale is a valid and reliable instrument with Cronbach's and polychoric alpha of .80 and .85, respectively.

The STEM Semantics Survey developed by Tyler-Wood, Knezek and Christensen (2010) was created for use with middle school, high school, and college students to measure interest in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and interest in STEM-related careers. The STEM Semantics Survey consists of 25 questions, divided into five subscales, with five semantic perception adjective pairs per subscale, (fascinating/ordinary, appealing/unappealing). Scores on the survey, range from five, indicating a poor attitude per subscale, to 35 demonstrating a high attitude per subscale. Content validity of the STEM Semantics Survey evaluated by researchers at the University of North Texas (Tyler-Wood et al., 2010) reported internal consistency reliabilities of the five subscales ranging from Cronbach's alpha of .84 to .93.

Results

Results are reported in two sections. The first section reports quantitative results from the Engagement Survey and the STEM Semantics Survey. The second section provides qualitative results and summarizes the focus group themes. Although students attended five sessions, qualitative results are only reported for three sessions due to session three being a continuation of session two and low participation during session four.

Quantitative Results

Quantitative results obtained from the Engagement Survey demonstrated that participating in the computing program positively affected students' attitude toward STEM and results from the STEM Semantics Survey indicated that the computing program positively affected students' interest in STEM-related careers. Of the various activities completed, students indicated that Introduction to Problem Solving, and Making/Sending Data were their favorite, earning a mean score of 3.67 on the total scale, $\mu = 3.64$ on the behavioral/cognitive subscale and $\mu = 3.70$ on the affective subscale of the Engagement Survey.

Table 2

Engagement Survey Means per Session

Session	Engagement Survey Means		
	Total Scale	Behavioral/Cognitive Subscale	Affective Subscale
One	3.39	3.30	3.56
Three	3.67	3.64	3.70
Five	3.52	3.42	3.71

STEM Semantics Survey data indicated that of the five subscales, students achieved the highest score on the technology subscale (31) and lowest score on the engineering subscale (27). Students scored two points higher on the science subscale (30) than on the math subscale (28). Additionally, students scored 28 on the career subscale indicating that overall, the majority of the students were interested in obtaining a career in a STEM-related field.

Table 3

STEM Semantics Survey Scores per Subscale

Subscale	Scores
Science	30
Math	28
Engineering	27
Technology	31
Career	28

Qualitative Results

Researchers used a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003) to code qualitative data obtained from conducting a focus group with sixth-grade participants. Four themes that emerged from the data included: 1) students enjoyed the computing activities; 2) students wanted to participate in additional computing activities; 3) students enjoyed being taught by interns (college students); and 4) students expressed interest in STEM-related careers. Of the 19 students participating in the focus group, 17 students expressed interest in a STEM-related career and two students were disinterested in STEM-related careers.

When asked how they enjoyed being taught by college students, one student replied, "The interns were a major influence on me and made me want to attend college to major in STEM." Another student replied, "I felt comfortable with the college students; they made learning fun and were entertaining. For a few minutes they were cool, but then made us get back to work." When asked about the activities, one student responded, "The activities were challenging yet fun and interesting. They required us to put forth a great deal of thought."

Discussion

By the time students are enrolled in middle school, many students perceive science as difficult, boring, and irrelevant to their lives (Guthrie, Klauda, & Morrison, 2012). Decreased motivation during adolescence is often more pronounced in math and science than in other subjects, (Wigfield, Eccles, Fredricks, Simpkins, Roeser, & Schiefele, 2015). Research indicates that it is absolutely imperative that middle school students are afforded opportunities to engage in STEM-based activities to increase the STEM pipeline. Additionally, educators need to discover opportunities to increase the number of underrepresented minorities in STEM-related careers. One strategy an in-service teacher can utilize to provide STEM-based learning activities to their middle school students is to collaborate with local colleges and universities.

This paper provided evidence regarding a collaboration between the DOE, a university's Department of Computer Science, a university's School of Education, and a P-12 school district. The collaboration allowed sixth-grade students identified as underrepresented minorities in STEM-related careers an opportunity to engage in computing activities taught by college interns majoring in computer science and STEM education. Quantitative data indicated that participating in the computing program positively affected students' attitude toward STEM and positively affected students' interest in STEM-related careers. Qualitative data provided evidence that participants exhibited an overall positive experience while participating in the computing program.

Limitations

While we found participating in the computing program improved students' attitude toward STEM and increased their interest in STEM-related careers, we acknowledge that this study was limited in scale and should not be generalized beyond our context. The study included 19 participants residing in a rural area located in the Southeastern region of the United States. Additionally, participants were from low-income households and identified as minorities underrepresented in STEM fields. Despite the addressed limitations, this study is significant in the contribution it makes to STEM-education research regarding middle school students by providing evidence that participating in a computing program positively impacted students' attitude toward STEM and interest in STEM-related careers.

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The Successful Middle School: This We Believe characteristics:

- Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and diverse.
- Instruction fosters learning that is active, purposeful, and democratic.
- Leaders are committed to and knowledgeable about young adolescents, equitable practices, and educational research.

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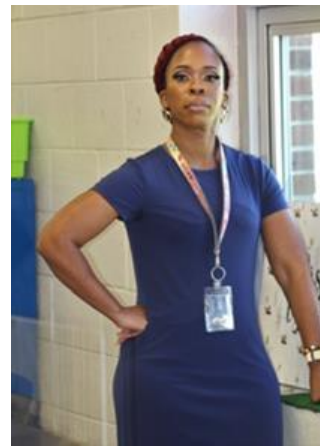
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Analysis of Middle School Performance from Pre-COVID to Post COVID

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Abstract: According to a January 11, 2021, SC Education Oversight Committee news release, Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) testing data from approximately 220,000 South Carolina students showed a projected decrease in the percentage of students meeting grade level expectations. The news release defines this as the “COVID Slide” (SCEOC, 2021). The purpose of this review is to see if those projections were accurate by conducting a state-wide review of middle school performance on the South Carolina College-and-Career-Ready Assessments (SC READY). Comparisons are made by subject, grade level, gender, ethnicity, and poverty status from 2019 to 2021.

Keywords: COVID-19, SC READY, performance, assessment, middle school

Introduction

It is clear that schools, teachers, students, and parents have been through quite an experience during the past two years. While everything appeared to be “business as usual” in the Fall of 2019, circumstances were about to change. Little did we know that this was the start of a global pandemic that we now know as COVID.

History of COVID

December 31, 2019 was a normal day here in South Carolina. We were all on winter break from school and probably preparing for the New Year’s Day celebrations. While this was occurring however, the World Health Organization’s office in China picked up a media statement by the Wuhan

Municipal Health Commission on cases of viral pneumonia in Wuhan Peoples Republic of China (WHO, 2021).

Nine days later on January 9, 2020, the virus was being referred to as a novel coronavirus (WHO, 2021). Authorities spent the next several days trying to determine the possibility of this

virus being transmitted from person to person. On January 22, 2020, the WHO reported that there was evidence of human transmission and they needed to investigate more. Four days later, on January 24, 2020, France notified the WHO of three cases there. All three people had been in Wuhan. On January 30, 2020, “the Director-General of the WHO declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), WHO’s highest level of alarm” (WHO, 2021, n.p.). This is also when it arrived in the United States. According to the WHO timeline for January 30, 2020, there were “98 cases and no deaths in 18 countries outside China. Four countries had evidence (eight cases) of human-to-human transmission outside China. Those countries were Germany, Japan, the United States of America, and Vietnam (WHO, 2021).

According to a DHEC news release on March 9, 2020, the novel virus, now known as COVID-19, made its first appearance in Camden, South Carolina on March 8, 2020. The news release offered further guidance stating that they “now have evidence of community spread that’s likely to be causing these initial cases in Camden in Kershaw County and the risk of spread to other communities is possible, as seen in other states across the country” (SCDHEC, 2020, para 4). However, they concluded that, “in line with CDC guidance, the department does not recommend closing schools or canceling public events at this time. DHEC will monitor absentee rates in schools and businesses as well as reports of illness in the community to determine if or when closures may be recommended” (SCDHEC, 2020, para 5).

This is when South Carolina schools, government officials, teachers and parents began to speculate about what would happen if the virus continued to spread. The news was filled with daily case number updates. Below is a table showing the number of cases in South Carolina as they accumulated after March 8, 2020 (SCDHEC, 2021).

Table 1
Timeline of the Number of Cases

Date	# Of Cases
March 8, 2020	1
March 9, 2020	6
April 1, 2020	1,595
May 1, 2020	6,551
June 1, 2020	12,952
August 10, 2020	103,416
September 1, 2020	122,367

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January 1, 2021	300, 133
March 8, 2021 (1 year anniversary)	452,708
May 1, 2021	482,891

Data source: WHO (2021)

On March 9, 2020, South Carolina had six confirmed cases. Six days later, the governor of South Carolina, Henry McMaster, issued Executive Order 2020-09. A joint news release on March 15, 2020 stated that public schools would be closed for students and non-essential employees through March 31st. A few days later, the governor issued an additional executive order to extend the K-12 school closures through the month of April (McMaster, 2020). On April 22, Governor McMaster held a press conference along with Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman to announce that schools would be closed for the remainder of the year (Daprile, 2020).

Fast forward to August 2020. The start of the 2020-2021 school year began with much concern. Many school districts reopened with the option of virtual or face to face instruction. This was accompanied with policies requiring masks or recommending masks. The end result was a disruption of normal educational services which began on March 15, 2020 and lasted for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year.

Toward the end of the 2020-2021 school year, students were asked to take the state assessments for the first time since 2019. In the Spring of 2020, the schools were shut down in March and no testing was completed.

The question I considered when looking at all these categories was whether or not there was a decrease significant enough that it could be considered a "COVID Slide."

Overview of the Data

While all the scores in South Carolina could certainly be reviewed, I decided to focus this article on the middle school grades. I define middle school grades to be grades six through eight. The task was to discover any differences in the Spring 2019 SC READY state results when compared to the Spring 2021 SC READY state results.

For the purposes of this data analysis, I define the Spring 2019 SC READY scores as Pre-COVID scores and the Spring 2021 scores as Post COVID scores. I am hesitant to describe these scores as Post COVID, acknowledging that schools are still dealing with the COVID issue even in the Fall of 2021. With this hesitation in mind, I did collect and analyze the two test score data sets to see what impact COVID may have had on those scores. I wondered if the data would confirm the decrease as mentioned by the EOC when they looked at Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) scores in January of 2021 (SCEOC, 2021).

Number Tested

To begin this process, I analyzed the number of students tested in 2019 and again in 2021. I know that there were some students that did not test in 2021 and I wanted to see how significant the drop in the number tested was. In 2019, there was an average per grade level of 59,162 students tested in ELA and Math for Grades 6-8. In contrast, there was an average per grade level of 50,780 students tested in 2021. This represented an average decrease of 8,382 students tested per grade level from Pre-COVID to Post COVID (SCDE, 2021).

Table 2
Testing Participation for 2019 and 2021

Grade	2019 # tested ELA	2021 # tested ELA	Difference
6	61413	50681	-10,732
7	58969	50972	-7,997
8	57055	50359	-6,696
AVG	59146	50671	-8475
Grade	2021 # tested MATH	2021 # tested MATH	Difference
6	61452	50963	-10,489
7	59009	51230	-7,779
8	57077	50480	-6,597
AVG	59179	50891	-8288

Data source: SCDE (2021a)

Enrollment

To take this analysis a step further, I decided to look at the enrollment numbers for 2019 and 2021 for grades 6 through 8. Was there a drop in enrollment as well? I used the average daily membership counts for the 135th day in 2019 and again in 2021. In 2019, the 135 average daily membership of students in grades 6 through 8 was 59,922 per grade level (SCDE, 2021b). Of those students, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, I was able to analyze the test score results for 59,162 students. In contrast, for 2021, the 135 average

daily membership of students in grades 6 through 8 increased to 61,747 per grade level (SCDE, 2021b). Of those students, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, I was able to analyze the test score results for 50,780 students. The numbers confirmed that while enrollment increased from 2019 to 2021, the number of students tested in 2021 was on average 8,382 students less than in 2019. This confirmed that there were students who opted out of testing in 2021. While this is a limitation, the number of students tested was still high enough for me to proceed with analyzing the results.

Table 3
Average Daily Membership for 2019 and 2021

Grade	135 ADM 2019	135 ADM 2021	Difference
6	62104	60662	-1442
7	59674	62000	2326
8	57990	62581	4591
AVG	59922	61748	1825

Data source: SCDE (2021a)

Overall Performance

After looking at the number tested and the enrollment numbers, the next step was to analyze the scores themselves. The indicator I chose to measure performance by was the percentage of students who scored Meets or Exceeds on the SC READY test in ELA and Math. For example, in 2019 the average percentage of students in grades six through eight who scored Meets or Exceeds for ELA and Math combined was 40.90%. In 2021, this same average of Meets and Exceeds declined to 36.87%. This represented a decrease of 4.03 % (SCDE, 2021a.).

The SC READY ELA performance for grades 6 through 8 as compared to the SC READY Math performance revealed that that average Meets and Exceeds in ELA for 2019 was 43.20 %. The Math Meets and Exceeds percentage was 38.60 %.

This revealed that students scored 4.60 % higher in ELA than they did in Math in 2019. Comparatively, in 2021, the ELA Meets and Exceeds percentage was 42.07 %. The Math Meets and Exceeds percentage was 31.67 %. In 2021, the ELA scores were 10.40 % higher than the Math percentage (SCDE, 2021a). This was a much larger gap between ELA and Math and led to the concern that the Math scores in 2021 were much lower than in 2019.

Comparing the 2019 ELA Meets and Exceeds percentage to the 2021 ELA Meets and Exceeds percentage shows a slight drop in performance from 43.20 % to 42.07 %. This was a 1.13 % drop. For the Math Meets and Exceed percentage, the drop from 2019 to 2021 was 6.63 % (SCDE, 2021a), which is significant.

Table 4
Meets and Exceeds Percentages for 2019 and 2021

Year	ELA Meets and Exceeds %	Math Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
2019	43.20%	38.60%	4.60%
2021	42.07%	31.67%	10.40%
Change	-1.13%	-6.63%	-----

Data source: (SCDE, 2021a)

Performance by Subject and Grade Level

A review of the data by subject and grade level revealed that the largest percentage decrease in ELA Meets and Exceeds from 2019 to 2021 occurred in grade 8. The percentage dropped from 44.60% in 2019 to 41.90% in 2021. For Math, the largest percentage decrease in Math Meets and Exceeds from 2019 to 2021 occurred in grade 6. The percentage dropped ten percentage points from 43.90% in 2019 to 33.90% in 2021 (SCDE, 2021a.).

There was one grade level and subject that actually had an increase in the percentage of students at the Meets and Exceeds level. This increase occurred in grade 6 for ELA only. In 2019, there were 41.00% of sixth graders who scored Meets and Exceeds on the ELA portion of the SC READY. In 2021, that percentage rose slightly to 41.80% (SCDE, 2021a.).

Table 5
Meets and Exceeds Percentages by Grade Level

Grade	2019 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	2021 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6	41.0	41.8	0.8
7	44.0	42.5	-1.5
8	44.6	41.9	-2.7
Grade	2019 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	2021 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6	43.9	33.9	-10
7	35.3	30.4	-4.9
8	36.6	30.7	-5.9

Data source: (SCDE, 2021a)

Performance by Gender

An analysis of the performance by gender in grades 6 through 8 was performed. Sixth grade males increased their ELA Meets and Exceeds percentage from 35.40 % in 2019 to 36.80 % in 2021. This was an increase of 1.40 %. Sixth grade females had a slight decrease in their ELA Meets and Exceeds percentage from 2019 to 2021. In 2019, 47.00 % of sixth grade females scored Meets and Exceeds and in 2021, that percentage dropped slightly to 46.90 %. A drop of 0.10%. An interesting note here is how much higher the female sixth grade students scored in ELA as compared to the males. While their respective scores from 2019 to 2021 did not seem to suffer, the female sixth graders scored approximately ten to eleven percentage points higher in ELA than the sixth-grade boys. Looking at grades seven and eight, the female students continued this pattern scoring anywhere from ten to twelve percentage points higher than the male students in ELA. Overall, looking at difference between the 2019 ELA scores and the 2021 ELA scores, only one group actually increased their performance in ELA. That group was the sixth-grade male group. The other scores remained approximately the same or showed a slight decrease ranging from a 0.10 % drop to a 3.90 % drop. This was a much smaller negative drop as compared to the drop in math scores (SCDE, 2021a).

Looking at the difference between the 2019 Math scores and the 2021 Math scores showed a different picture. Each grade level and each gender showed a decrease in the percentage of Meets and Exceeds from 2019 to 2021. For example, sixth grade males' math percentage of Meets and Exceeds in 2019 was 41.70 %. In 2021, the percentage dropped by 8.20 % to 33.50 %. This was the second largest drop in the gender category. The largest decrease in scores occurred with the sixth-grade female group. In 2019, the sixth-grade females had a Meets and Exceeds percentage of 46.20 %. In 2021, that percentage dropped 12 percentage points to 34.20 (SCDE, 2021).

One final note to make about the analysis of the scores by gender. In both ELA and Math, for both 2019 and 2021, the female group of students had a higher Meets and Exceeds percentage for every grade level except one. That group was the seventh-grade male group. In 2021 they scored 30.60 % Meets and Exceeds as compared to 30.20 % Meets and Exceed for the seventh-grade females. This was a slight difference of 0.40 %. In every other grade and subject, the female students outperformed the male students (SCDE, 2021a).

Table 6
Meets and Exceeds Percentages by Gender

Grade	2019 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	2021 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Males	35.4	36.8	1.4
7 Males	38.2	38.2	0
8 Males	37.7	36.5	-1.2
Grade	2019 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	2021 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Females	47.0	46.9	-0.1
7 Females	50.0	47.0	-3
8 Females	51.7	47.8	-3.9
Grade	2019 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	2021 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Males	41.7	33.5	-8.2
7 Males	33.9	30.6	-3.3
8 Males	33.7	29.1	-4.6

Grade	2019 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	2021 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Females	46.2	34.2	-12
7 Females	36.7	30.2	-6.5
8 Females	39.4	32.5	-6.9

Data source: (SCDE, 2021a)

Performance by Ethnicity

An analysis of the performance by ethnicity in grades 6 through 8 was performed. The four demographic groups analyzed were Hispanic, African American, Asian, and White. In almost every grade level and every demographic group, the percentage of students scoring Meets and Exceeds decreased from 2019 to 2021. There were two exceptions to this. Sixth grade Asian students saw an increase in their ELA Meets and Exceeds percentage. In 2019, the Asian students had an ELA Meets and Exceeds percentage rate of 69.40 %. In 2021, that percentage increased by 4.40 % to 73.80 %. Sixth grade White students also saw an increase in their ELA Meets and Exceeds percentage. In 2019, the White students had an ELA Meets and Exceeds percentage rate of 54.40%. In 2021, that percentage increased by 1.00 % to 55.40 %. For Math, all percentages among all demographic groups dropped. The decreases ranged from 4.00 % to as high as 13.60 % (SCDE, 2021a).

Performance of Hispanic Students

Hispanic students dropped an average of 1.83 % in ELA and 8.47 % in Math. The largest decrease among all demographic groups was in the sixth-grade math Hispanic group. This group saw the Meets and Exceeds percentage drop 13.60 percentage points from 2019 to 2021 (SCDE, 2021a).

Table 7
Meets and Exceeds Percentages Hispanic Students

Grade	2019 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	2021 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Hispanic	33.80	30.70	-3.10
7 Hispanic	35.40	32.80	-2.60
8 Hispanic	36.80	34.30	-2.50
Grade	2019 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	2021 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Hispanic	39.20	25.60	-13.60
7 Hispanic	27.90	21.50	-6.40
8 Hispanic	29.20	23.80	-5.40

Data source: (SCDE, 2021a)

Performance of African American Students

African American students dropped an average of 2.73 % in ELA and 6.93 % in Math. Sixth grade math students, like the Hispanic group, showed the biggest decrease of 10.50 %. The sixth-grade African American group maintained their ELA percentage from 2019 to 2021. This percentage dropped less than 1% with a decrease of only 0.40 %. This was the lowest decrease of all the demographic groups and subjects (SCDE, 2021a).

Table 8
Meets and Exceeds Percentages African American Students

Grade	2019 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	2021 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 African American	22.30	21.90	-0.40
7 African American	24.20	22.70	-1.50
8 African American	26.10	22.50	-3.60
Grade	2019 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	2021 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 African American	23.40	12.90	-10.50
7 African American	14.50	10.60	-3.90
8 African American	18.10	11.70	-6.40

Data source: (SCDE, 2021a)

Performance of Asian Students

Asian students increased their average 0.43 % in ELA but showed a decrease of 7.13 % in Math. An interesting note here is that the sixth-grade Asian s group increased their ELA percentage from 2019 to 2021. This percentage increased by 4.40 %. This was the highest increase of all the demographic groups in both ELA and Math (SCDE, 2021a).

Table 9
Meets and Exceeds Percentages Asian Students

Grade	2019 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	2021 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Asian	69.40	73.80	4.40
7 Asian	73.90	73.10	-0.80
8 Asian	70.80	68.50	-2.30
Grade	2019 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	2021 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Asian	77.80	72.30	-5.50
7 Asian	71.60	67.60	-4.00
8 Asian	73.20	67.10	-6.10

Data source: (SCDE, 2021a)

Performance of Caucasian Students

Sixth grade Caucasian students dropped an average of 1.03 % in ELA and 6.93 % in Math. The sixth grade Caucasian group increased their ELA percentage from 2019 to 2021. This percentage increased by 1.00 %. This was the only increase for this demographic group (SCDE, 2021a).

Table 10
Meets and Exceeds Percentages Caucasian Students

Grade	2019 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	2021 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Caucasian	54.4	55.4	1
7 Caucasian	57.8	56.1	-1.7
8 Caucasian	56.7	54.3	-2.4
Grade	2019 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	2021 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Caucasian	57.9	47.7	-10.2
7 Caucasian	49.3	43.7	-5.6
8 Caucasian	48.3	42.7	-5.6

Data source: (SCDE, 2021a)

A summary of the data revealed that Math across all Demographics showed the highest drop in Meets and Exceeds percentage from 2019 to 2021. The overall average drop was 6.93 % in Math as compared to 1.29 % drop in ELA. Every demographic group in grades 6, 7 and 8 showed a drop in their percentage of Meets and Exceeds in Math. For ELA, only the sixth grade Asian and Caucasian student group showed a slight gain from 2019 to 2021. However, this same sixth grade group also had the highest drop in scores for math for each demographic group (SCDE, 2021).

Performance by Poverty Status

An analysis of the performance by poverty classification in grades 6 through 8 was performed. The average decrease in ELA Meets and Exceeds percentage for students in poverty was 1.33 % from 2019 to 2021. In Math, that percentage drop increased to an average of 6.77 %. For students categorized as not being in poverty, the average decrease in ELA Meets and Exceeds percentage was 1.10 % and 7.30 % in Math. Students of poverty had a lower percentage drop then the non-poverty students in Math. As the demographic data showed, the best performing group among the poverty and non-poverty group was in sixth grade ELA and the worst performing group was in sixth grade Math (SCDE, 2021a).

Table 11
Meets and Exceeds Percentages Non-Poverty Students

Grade	2019 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	2021 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Non-Poverty	61.90	62.30	0.40
7 Non-Poverty	64.60	63.00	-1.60
8 Non-Poverty	62.20	60.10	-2.10
Grade	2019 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	2021 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Non-Poverty	65.30	54.90	-10.40
7 Non-Poverty	55.80	50.30	-5.50
8 Non-Poverty	54.90	48.90	-6.00

Data source: (SCDE, 2021a)

Table 12
Meets and Exceeds Percentages Poverty Students

Grade	2019 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	2021 ELA Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Poverty	28.60	28.80	0.20
7 Poverty	30.60	29.20	-1.40
8 Poverty	32.10	29.30	-2.80
Grade	2019 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	2021 MATH Meets and Exceeds %	Difference
6 Poverty	31.20	20.60	-10.60
7 Poverty	21.90	17.50	-4.40
8 Poverty	23.60	18.30	-5.30

Data source: (SCDE, 2021a)

Conclusion

This article began with a brief history of how COVID began. Once that history was established, the terms Pre-COVID and Post COVID were defined. Pre-COVID scores were defined as the 2019 SCREADY scores for grades six through eight. Post COVID scores were defined as the 2021 SCREADY scores for grades six through eight. Once establishing those parameters, the data analysis began by looking at the number of students tested in each of those years for grades six through eight. This was important to look at in order to determine if there was a significant drop in the number of students tested. I had heard this to be the case, but I needed to see what the data showed. The data revealed that there was an average decrease in the number of students tested in 2021 as compared to 2019. That average decrease was 8,382 students. This is somewhat significant given that the enrollment in grades six through eight increased an average of 1,825 students from 2019 to 2021. I consider this a small limitation, but the number tested was still high enough to continue the analysis.

Analysis of the performance in grades six through eight looked at several categories. Reviewing all of the middle school students who tested, the percentage of students who scored Meets and Exceeds decreased an average of 4.03% from 2019 to 2021. This did represent a decrease in the overall ELA and Math performance on the SCREADY from 2019 to 2021. Whether this 4.03% decrease would be large enough to be considered a “COVID Slide”, as mentioned in the news article, is debatable (SCEOC, 2021).

After looking at the overall scores, the data were then disaggregated into several categories. Those categories included: overall ELA scores, overall Math scores, ELA scores per grade level, Math scores per grade level, scores for females in each subject, scores for males in each subject, scores for Hispanics in each subject, scores for African American students in each subject, scores for Asian students in each subject, scores for Caucasian students in each subject and scores in each subject for students identified as being in poverty and those not being in poverty.

The question I considered when looking at all these categories was whether or not there was a decrease significant enough that it could be considered a “COVID Slide”, as mentioned in the news article (SCEOC, 2021). From 2019 to 2021, the Math scores did drop by 6.63% as compared to the ELA scores that only dropped 1.13%. Disaggregating this data further, grade 6 had the largest decrease in Math scores from 2019 to 2021. The decrease was 10.0%, perhaps large enough to be characterized as a “COVID Slide” (SCEOC, 2021). Referring to Table 5, you can also see that Math scores in each grade level had a larger decrease than ELA.

Another notable change in the scores is found in Table 6. Sixth-grade males increased their percentage of Meets and Exceeds in ELA from 2019 to 2021. Seventh-grade ELA male scores from 2019 to 2021 remained the same. These were the only two categories that did not decrease. On the other hand, sixth-grade males had the second largest decrease in Math scores from 2019 to 2021. That decrease equaled 8.2%. The

only students who saw a higher decrease in Math scores were the eighth-grade females. Their scores dropped by 12%. Another potential “COVID Slide” (SCEOC, 2021).

When analyzing the data by ethnicity, there were some notable changes in those scores as well. Table 7 revealed sixth-grade Hispanic students had a 13.6% decrease in Math scores from 2019 to 2021. This was two, or in some cases, three times more of a decrease than the other Hispanic scores in the table. Table 8 revealed that sixth-grade African American students had a 10.5% decrease in Math scores from 2019 to 2021. Table 9 revealed that sixth-grade Asian students increased their ELA scores from 2019 to 2021 by 4.40%. This was one of only two increases in scores among all the ethnicities. The other increase was a 1% increase in ELA scores for sixth grade Caucasian students. Table 10 revealed that sixth-grade Caucasian students had a 10.2% decrease in ELA scores from 2019 to 2021. All of these decreases could be a potential “COVID Slide” (SCEOC, 2021).

Tables 11 and 12 concluded the data analysis. These tables revealed test data by poverty level. Both poverty identified students and non-poverty identified students had over a 10% decrease in sixth-grade math scores. The data revealed a 10.6% decrease for poverty identified students and a 10.4% decrease for non-poverty identified students.

Overall, Math scores had the largest decrease in percentage of students Meeting or Exceeding the expectations on SCREADY. Diving a little deeper into this fact, the sixth graders had the highest decreases in these math scores. We may conclude from this that there was a “COVID Slide” in Math scores from 2019 to 2021, especially in sixth-grade (SCEOC, 2021). Most of the other grades and subject did see decreases, but not at the levels of the sixth-grade students in Math.

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Emergent Bilingual Students and Middle Level Social Studies: Overcoming the “Huh?”

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Abstract: Throughout my career in middle level education, I have taken note of how my emergent bilingual students react to assignments and lessons in my history classes. Direct instruction and primary source materials can prove especially challenging. In this article, I hope to provide middle school Social Studies educators with strategies that I have found to be successful in my classroom when teaching English Learner (EL) students history. Building a relationship, adhering to accommodations, scaffolding concepts and vocabulary, and incorporating a student’s culture into lessons can help us overcome the “Huh?” in the classroom.

Keywords: emergent bilingual, English Learner (EL), direct instruction, primary source, accommodations, scaffolding, cultural incorporation

Introduction

Imagine that you have been dropped into 4th period of a 7th grade classroom in Japan. You know very little about Japan, its culture, its people, and its education system. You also have absolutely no idea what the teacher in your 4th period class is saying but you are expected to answer questions and complete assignments. You can feel your cheeks heating when you are asked a question and have no idea how to respond. Everyone is staring, so the teacher dismisses you and moves on with the lesson. You immediately shut down and stare at your desk for the rest of the day.

This scenario happens more often than most teachers realize. Every day, students who do not use English as their primary language or are from other countries are placed into the American public school system. In fact, the United States Department of Education (2018) reports that South Carolina alone has experienced a 200

to 399.9% increase in the number of English Learner (EL) students attending South Carolina public schools.

Assimilating into not only a new home but a new nation, creates anxiety and fear in many young students within our nation’s school systems.

Add in the subject material that these students are expected to learn, and you have a problem that continues to compound on itself. Middle school social studies, and the subject’s source materials, can be extremely difficult for EL students. For example, try presenting a student who has just arrived from Honduras with a copy of the Declaration of Independence. Ask that student to tell you the main idea. You will undoubtedly get the “Huh?” look or a blank stare accompanied with a total shut down. The difficult part of teaching history to EL students is overcoming that “Huh?”. Here are some strategies to help.

Connect with the Student

Connecting with the student is crucial, even if the connection you make is something small like learning to say your student’s name correctly. Many cultures around the world place an incredible amount of significance on the names of their children. Google now has a mobile version of its Translate application, which makes communicating with students in any language a breeze. I communicate daily with one of my students who speaks Russian using this app and we have learned so much about one another. I know her music preferences, what part of Ukraine she is from, how many siblings she has, etc. It has made all the difference in her learning in my class. Patience is also essential with this step, especially when teaching middle school EL students. We must always be aware that EL students have typically left behind friends, communities, and even families in some cases (Haynes & Zacarian, 2018). This kind of emotional upheaval can cause lasting trauma that will likely take time to heal. Be patient and consistent. Ask questions every day regarding their day, needs, and struggles. In time, they will come to trust you. Building the relationship with these students must happen first.

Work with your EL Teachers

Accommodations are there for a reason for EL students. Work closely with your district or school’s EL instructor to determine the best strategies to employ with your students. Typical accommodations can include providing vocabulary terms ahead of a lesson, scaffolding certain concepts, or using videos and stories in the classroom. Once you have been made aware of your EL student’s

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accommodations, adhere to them. Be aware, this process is going to take a lot of your time; however, when you begin to see your student understand the concepts you are trying to teach them, it will be worth it. With history classes, teaching vocabulary ahead of time, utilizing pictures with words in students' native language and English, and modeling expected outcomes are essential.

A good point of reference for this would be to show your EL students images of the *Hunley* submarine after you have provided them with the definitions of what "submarine" means in English and in their dominant language. History offers us a wealth of images for all levels of students and by teaching vocabulary terms prior to the lesson, your EL students can begin to make connections between the words they have learned and the images you are showing them on topics like the American Civil War.

Set High Expectations

Providing middle level EL students with an equitable education simultaneously requires setting certain expectations of these students. Setting high expectations is something that teachers have heard in professional development meetings for years; however, where our EL students are concerned, high expectations can either create success or disconnection in the classroom. In the next section discussing scaffolding, I will mention keeping the lessons and materials presented to emergent bilingual students as basic as possible. What should be understood is that "basic" in this context does not imply "simple" or "easy." Teach your emergent bilingual students the same content that you are teaching your monolingual students but modify the instruction and materials to reflect your EL students' present level of knowledge on the subject you are teaching.

Scaffold, Scaffold, Scaffold

Now that you have established a meaningful relationship, set high expectations, and begun to implement your EL student's accommodations, it is imperative that you build upon their knowledge throughout the school year. Keep things basic at first. For example, identify the main points in your lesson on the French and Indian War and then begin building on that knowledge to show your EL student that this war was the catalyst for an even bigger war – The American Revolution. Once you have assessed that your students have shown growth in those main points, move onto more challenging material; however, continue to keep this material as basic as possible.

Incorporate Their Culture

With history and geography classes, incorporating an EL student's culture can be simple. If you are teaching geography, when you come to the continent of your EL student's home nation, ask them if they are comfortable sharing what their home was like with the class. Chances are, they are eager to talk about their experiences.

Middle school social studies classes present us with a healthy dose of perspective. Try encouraging all the students in your class to see historical events from multiple sides. When discussing the Russian Revolution, you might ask a student of Russian nationality or descent how this subject was taught to them.

Currently, I have a student whose family is from Mali. I was so excited when he told me this. We discussed in class how much of the food we consume in the South is heavily influenced by African culture. My student was ecstatic to share how his family prepares food at home with my other students and, in turn, the other students were shocked at how similar the preparation was to the food they are accustomed to. This discussion allowed me to make connections with my students about the Atlantic Slave Trade. It was a fantastic teaching day.

Conclusion

Teaching EL students can be one of the most rewarding experiences in an educator's career; however, it can also prove to be one of the most intimidating and confounding experiences in an educator's career. I am unable to say how many times I have seen my colleagues struggle with students who arrive in their classes with little or no English proficiency. I have had colleagues tell me to just "make them comfortable" and that their grades will fall where they may. Yes, making EL students comfortable is part of the plan, but we as teachers should do this by establishing a meaningful relationship with our EL students, working with closely with the EL professionals in our district or schools, assisting our students' learning by building on prior knowledge and scaffolding, and aiding assimilation by adding in parts of our EL students' culture.

Letting middle level EL students fall between the cracks because we might be on unsteady ground cannot happen. These students deserve an education just as much as everyone else. Be vigilant in providing accommodations and, above all, be patient.

Building the relationship with these students must happen first.

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A South Asian Vice President Takes Office: A Middle School Teaching Opportunity

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Abstract: Middle school students need to be aware of geopolitical issues that impact current events. The inauguration of a South Asian vice president demands awareness of South Asian geography and an understanding of the complexities of identity. In this article, we explain why the study of Asia, and in particular South Asia, is important, in both historical and contemporary contexts, and we provide lesson ideas for middle school students based on the Geography dimension of the C3 framework. The lesson activities are interdisciplinary and are intended to serve as resources for middle level teachers in any content area.

Keywords: geographical awareness, South Asia

Introduction

Racial and ethnic labeling is a common practice, but amidst the inauguration of the 46th President and Vice President of the United States, it became apparent how little people truly understand about these labels. Prior to Wednesday, January 20, 2021, Vice President Kamala Harris had been described by different media outlets in a variety of ways including: “black,” “African American,” “Indian American,” “Black and Indian American,” “Black-South Asian,” being of “African and Indian heritage,” “of Asian and black heritage,” “equally Indian and black,” “a black woman and an Indian woman,” and “a person of color.” The indecisiveness over how to capture Harris’ multiracial identity ended on Inauguration Day when Harris was consistently introduced as “South Asian” by different media outlets. While agreement over this term settled the confusion over how to refer to Harris, it presented a new problem: does the U.S. population have the geographical awareness to accurately interpret what the term “South Asian” means? Equally worth questioning: Are middle school teachers seizing the opportunity to increase students’ geographical awareness?

The Need for Accurate Historical and Geographical Knowledge

An accurate understanding of the terms used to describe diverse ethnic groups in the U.S. and around the world is a critical component of historical and geographical awareness. As outlined in *“The Successful Middle School: This We Believe,”* educators should ensure their curriculum, instruction, and assessment is embedded with instruction that is active, purposeful, and democratic; the complexity and relevance of America’s 46th Vice President creates opportunity for all three in the middle school classroom (Bishop et al., 2021).

Although Harris’ election was hailed as a breakthrough moment for women and minorities, there was confusion over which minority groups Harris belongs to. One second grade teacher in a popular Facebook group for educators wrote: “...we talked about how Kamala Harris was the first woman, black, and native vice president.” Clearly, this teacher interpreted the term “Indian” as meaning Harris was from North America’s indigenous population. Such a misunderstanding leads one to question the history that students learn in school about Christopher Columbus. Without access to accurate historical information, students are denied opportunities to understand the roots of complex and intersecting racial, ethnic, and cultural identities reflected in The C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards.

The C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards aims to strengthen students’ knowledge about civics, economics, geography, and history (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], n.d.). Dimension 2 of the framework involves “Applying Disciplinary Tools and Concepts,” such as looking at one “probable cause” of the voyages of Columbus being his desire to obtain Asian riches by sailing westward. When looking at “multiple causes,” the framework provides the example of the Ottoman Empire’s expansion which disrupted trade routes that provided Western Europeans with access to Asia. One can quickly see how these topics can be related to the Geography subsection of Dimension 2, as starting in Kindergarten students should be “using maps, graphs, photographs, and other representations to describe places and the relationships and interactions that shape them” (NCSS, n.d., p. 41). By focusing on Columbus’ desire to find a new trade route to Asia, and engaging in map activities that trace his route to North America, middle school students will gain a deeper understanding of the difference between the people of Asia and North America indiscriminately referred to as “Indians.” In other words, understanding the terms used to refer to people’s racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, requires an understanding of geography.

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Gaps in Students' Geographical Awareness

Our review of students' knowledge about the countries of Asia illuminates students' limited geographical awareness. Survey results from the second author's fifth through eighth grade students (n=143) revealed that almost 50 percent of students thought of China and Japan when hearing the term "South Asia." Undergraduate college students (n=70) surveyed by the first author incorrectly named 15 countries as being in South Asia. Relating these misconceptions to the term "South Asian" used to capture Harris' Indian heritage, we found awareness about India particularly lacking, with only 15 percent of middle-school students and 21 percent of college students naming India as a country in South Asia.

Our findings regarding students' lack of geographical awareness are supported by nationwide assessment data. Results of the 2018 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that 75% of eighth graders scored at or below the "basic" level, reflecting a lack of foundational geographic concepts (The Nation's Report Card, 2021). And when the focus in schools is on acquiring 21st century skills, geographical knowledge has never been more important. The U.S. Department of Education's international strategy includes, "increasing global and cultural competencies of all U.S. students" (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, p. 3).

The Importance of Learning About South Asia

Assessment data indicate that students need more geographical knowledge, but one might ask: *why Asia?* Given that 60 percent of the world's population resides in Asia (Statista, 2021), teaching the disciplines of economics, civics, geography, and history cannot be adequately addressed if students do not have an understanding of Asia's influential history and global interconnectedness. Since the earliest civilizations in the Indus Valley, the Indian Ocean has served as an important conduit for the spread of goods, religion, and ideas. Today, the Indian Ocean continues to serve as a geopolitical bedrock for international trade (Pearson, 2003). In order to become a global citizen, students need to understand the rationale behind international policies and understand the impact of global decisions.

Many great civilizations, as well as several major world religions, emerged in Asia, providing insights into the enduring contributions of the past as well as global conflicts of the present. Today, the South Asian countries of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are three of the world's most populous countries (United States Census Bureau, 2020), and are home to three of the world's largest Muslim populations (Diamant, 2019). Knowledge of religious conflicts in this region is critical for understanding current events. The fact that not a single middle-school or college student out of the 213 students we surveyed named Bangladesh as a country in South Asia indicates that they are likely unaware of Myanmar's genocide of the Rohingya people that has resulted in 1 million refugees fleeing to Bangladesh. Without

knowledge of human rights abuses, students will miss opportunities to develop the civic ideals needed to advocate for social justice.

We also cannot omit Asia's role in American history. In the 20th century, the United States' three major wars (i.e., World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War) were fought in Asia. U.S. troops were recently withdrawn from Afghanistan, where they had been fighting a war against terrorism with specific connections to South Asia due to Pakistan's role in supporting the Taliban (Hadid & Sattar, 2019). What reality do these situations create? Teaching social studies in the U.S., whether focusing on history, geography, economics, or religion, relies on studying Asia. Students also cannot study political science or civics without learning about the role of South Asians in the U.S. Indians are the fastest growing immigrant population in the U.S., which is already home to over 2.7 million Indian immigrants. This situation is not trivial given that Asian Americans turned out in record numbers for the 2020 Presidential election and helped secure Harris' place as the first South Asian vice president (Boykins, 2020).

Can we truly feel like we have done our job as middle school educators in preparing students for college, careers, and civic life if we do not devote time to teaching students about South Asia? According to Gupta (2021), "For a long time, South Asians - people from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, etc. - were put under Asian American" but it is now clear that "they merit a 'group name' of their own" (para 2). If we want our students to be globally competent then we need to provide them with the tools to interpret the term "South Asian" through a global lens. How do we do that? In this case, it requires ensuring that the study of South Asia's history, geography, and current events remain an intentional and ongoing focus in middle level education.

Taking the Next Steps in the Classroom

To assist teachers in embedding lessons that address South Asia and geography into the curriculum, we provide a table of lesson ideas and compelling questions based on state social studies standards. We have aligned the lesson topics and learning activities with NCSS Themes, as well as the Geography strand of the C3 Framework. For each lesson, we provide resources for teachers and students with the aim of contributing to a curriculum that is Challenging, Exploratory, Integrative, and Diverse, one of the 18 characteristics of "The Successful Middle School: This We Believe." In order to live in a globally interdependent world, students need to understand the political, economic, and cultural influences on trade, conflict, human rights, and global ecology. Through closer examination of these issues, students will recognize their rights and responsibilities as global citizens and develop the intellectual curiosity to question the meaning of the term "South Asian" and the significance for the U.S. of having a South Asian Vice President.

Lesson Ideas

<p align="center">NCSS Theme: People, Places, and Environments</p> <p>C3 Framework: D2.Geo.2.6-8. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions, and changes in their environmental characteristics.</p> <p>Compelling Question: How do environmental factors influence the way people live?</p>		
Learning Objectives	Lesson Activities	Resources
Compare and contrast maps of the Indus River Valley civilization and the present day to determine the physical environment's geopolitical impact then and now.	<p>Map activity: Annotate maps to compare and contrast physical features between the past and present.</p> <p>Research activity: Create a multimedia presentation to explain the geopolitical impact of the region's physical environment.</p>	<p>nationalgeographic.org/education Classroom Resources → Resource Library & Mapping</p> <p>History's Histories http://www.historyshistories.com/india-geography.html</p> <p>PBS - The Story of India http://www.pbs.org/thestoryofindia</p> <p>khanacademy.org Search: Ancient India</p>
<p align="center">NCSS Theme: Production, Distribution, and Consumption</p> <p>C3 Framework: D2.Geo.4.6-8. Explain how cultural patterns and economic decisions influence environments and the daily lives of people in both nearby and distant places.</p> <p>Compelling Question: How does foreign trade impact a culture?</p>		
Learning Objectives	Lesson Activities	Resources
Contextualize the Indian Ocean as the center of global exchanges within Eastern Hemisphere trade networks and appraise the current role of South Asia in the global economy.	<p>Timeline activity: Create a timeline depicting goods traded across the Indian Ocean with infographics showing the growth of South Asia's economy over the last century.</p> <p>Literacy activity: Create an informational brochure to raise awareness of human rights issues related to global trade.</p>	<p>Timeline Maker: Sutori.com</p> <p>Khanacademy.org Search: "International Commerce, Snorkeling Camels, and The Indian Ocean Trade"</p> <p>globalization101.org Search: "Manufacturing: After the Bangladesh Factory Collapse"</p> <p>Indianoceanhistory.org 20th Century Globalization → Search: Trade</p>
<p align="center">NCSS Theme: Culture</p> <p>C3 Framework: D2.Geo.7.3-5. Explain how cultural and environmental characteristics affect the distribution and movement of people, goods, and ideas.</p> <p>Compelling Questions: What is the relationship between geography and the need to trade? How do religious practices change societies?</p>		
Learning Objectives	Lesson Activities	Resources
Describe the emergence of the Harappan Civilization and its major achievements.	<p>Map activity: Create a map showing the Harappan Civilization's modern-day location.</p> <p>Art activity: Create a diorama of a Harappan village depicting four major achievements.</p> <p>Role-play activity: Simulate a trading event between Harappan villagers and the Mesopotamians.</p>	<p>artsandculture.google.com Search: Harappan</p> <p>Harrapa.com https://www.harappa.com/slideshows</p> <p>www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize Search: Indus</p> <p>Kiddle https://kids.kiddle.co/Indus_Valley_civilization</p>

Explain the development and impact of Hinduism and Buddhism on India.	Art/Literacy activity: Create a graffiti wall for each religion with images and phrases. Literacy activity: In pairs, adopt the role of a Hindu or Buddhist and exchange letters describing their beliefs, holy sites, and spread of the religion.	khanacademy.org Search: "Hinduism and Buddhism" Newsela.com Search: "The Origin of World Religions" Hinduism and Buddhism Lecture https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIu28WoPNCE
NCSS Theme: Time, Continuity, and Change C3 Framework: D2.Geo.4.6-8. Explain how cultural patterns and economic decisions influence environments and the daily lives of people in both nearby and distant places. Compelling Question: In what ways do personal and cultural experiences shape perspectives?		
Learning Objectives	Lesson Activities	Resources
Analyze Western imperialism's impact in Asia and explain India's economic and political relationship with Britain.	Literacy activity: Create an anthology of diary entries from the perspectives of Indian people with differing views of British colonization. Research activity: Review maps and other primary and secondary sources to create a case study of the region before, during, and after the colonial period.	Stanford History Education Group https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons/india-partition tv.pbslearningmedia.org Search: "East India Company in India" reconnectingasia.csis.org Search: "How Britain's Colonial Railways Transformed India"
NCSS Theme: Civic Ideals and Practices C3 Framework: D2.Geo.6.6-8. Explain how the physical and human characteristics of places and regions are connected to human identities and cultures. Compelling Question: When should individuals fight for others' rights?		
Learning Objectives	Lesson Activities	Resources
Research South Asia's post-independence struggles, including the subcontinent's partitioning into India and Pakistan and human rights violations against Muslims in Kashmir and the Rohingya people in Myanmar.	Map activity: Annotate a map to compare and contrast South Asia before and after the partitioning. Research activity: Research conflicts over Kashmir and write an argumentative essay from the perspective of a modern day Indian, Kashmiri, or Pakistani. Literacy activity: Assume the role of a news reporter and create a Flipgrid detailing the plight of the Rohingya people.	Aljazeera.com Search: "How India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were formed" The Choices Program https://www.choices.edu/curriculum-unit/indian-independence-question-partition https://www.choices.edu/teaching-news-lesson/myanmar-and-the-rohingya
NCSS Theme: Global Connections C3 Framework: D2.Geo.6.3-5. Describe how environmental and cultural characteristics influence population distribution in specific places or regions. Compelling Question: How do world population changes impact the geographic landscape?		
Learning Objectives	Lesson Activities	Resources

Evaluate South Asia's population distributions and patterns (i.e., conditions driving migration and demographic change).	<p>Map activity: Annotate a map to show how economic, environmental, and politically driven migration has impacted South Asia.</p> <p>Math activity: Design a chart, graph, or infographic to illustrate population trends in South Asia.</p> <p>Literacy activity: Create a Public Service Announcement about the causes and consequences of South Asia's population growth.</p>	<p>Worldometer https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/southern-asia-population</p> <p>History.org https://worldpopulationhistory.org</p> <p>https://www.esri.com World Geography → March of Time</p> <p>C3 Teachers https://c3teachers.org/inquiries/population-growth</p>
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Learning Hunts Are Educational Scavenger Hunts

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Abstract: Research has shown that integrating subjects provides opportunities for more relevant, less fragmented, and more stimulating experiences for learners (Furner and Kumar, 2007). Learning Hunts allow students to take ownership of their learning through valuable and connected experiences while staying engaged the entire time.

Keywords: student-centered, integrated curriculum

Introduction

Are you always pressed for time to finish your state's curriculum? Would you like for students to realize the value of all subjects in school? Does your principal say you need to keep your students "engaged?" If you answered "yes" to any of those questions, Learning Hunts are what you need in your classroom! Learning Hunts include interactive task cards that use technology and multiple resources such as books, poems, and other supplemental materials to introduce or conclude a unit of study.

Literature Review

What is an integrated curriculum? An integrated curriculum, also known as an interdisciplinary curriculum, is defined in the Greenwood Dictionary of Education as "an instructional model whereby multiple disciplines are used to promote and/or enhance learning about a particular topic or skill. This supports the belief that students have greater focus and understanding when content is experienced in a variety of contexts" (Collins & O'Brien, 2003 p.186). An integrated curriculum develops the child's ability to transfer their learning to other settings and build on relationships in a holistic manner.

What is student-centered learning? While there is a large body of theoretical and anecdotal literature, there is no agreed-upon definition for the overall concept of

student-centered learning.

Some theorists provide a broad definition such as "students have a choice in their learning," while others provide specific principles (Kaput, 2018). Some of the principles agreed upon surrounding student-centered learning include voice, choice, real life relevancy, and proof of mastery.

In a truly student-centered learning environment, teachers and students work collaboratively to co-create a learning plan that best suits the needs of each learner (Green & Harrington, 2020). Teachers should allow their students' interests to drive the content, skills, and concepts covered which should also be relevant to the students' lives. Teachers should offer a variety of product options (proof of mastery) based on what they know about their students. This could mean creating choice boards which allow students to share what they learned.

What does the research say about integrating subjects? Research suggests that an integrated approach to learning is more brain compatible. The brain learns best in real-life, immersion-style multi-path learning. A fragmented presentation of learning can forever kill the joy and love of learning (Jensen, 1996). Integrating subjects allows for students to see how the world in which we live is connected. Mathematics, when integrated with science, provides the opportunity for students to apply the discipline to real situations that are relevant to the student's world and presented from the student's own perspective (Furner & Kumar, 2007).

What does the research say about student-centered activities? Student-centered learning proves to be especially beneficial to economically disadvantaged students and students whose parents have not attended college (McKenna, 2014). Almost without exception, students in any type of interdisciplinary or integrative curriculum do as well as, and often better than, students in a conventional departmentalized program (Vars & Beane, 2001). Learner motivation and learning increase when learners have a say in their own learning and are treated as co-creators in the learning process (McCombs & Whistler, 1997). Interdisciplinary Teamed Instruction has positive effects on student performance, particularly for lower-achieving students. Many schools which have used interdisciplinary instruction for more than two years, reported an overall upward trend in standardized test scores (Burns, 1994). When students get the opportunity to discover new knowledge and apply that

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knowledge, they are more likely to succeed (Bolak, Bialach, & Dunphy, 2005).

The benefits of using a student-centered learning approach using integrated subjects include:

- Students gain a deeper understanding of the content
- Students are active participants in their education
- Accommodates for a variety of learning styles
- Develops higher level thinking skills
- Builds collaboration, social/emotional, and/or problem-solving skills
- Gets students interested about learning new things and keeps them wanting to learn

How do learning hunts work?

Students are purposely partnered with someone who will challenge their thinking, work well together, and/or have the same interests. Each student has their own answer sheet. Partners work on one task card at a time. (Sample task cards below.)

Notes to the teacher:

1. Task cards are created and printed as slides in PowerPoint. (Laminate for multiple uses.) (Students record their answers on their answer sheet, not the task card.)
2. Each Learning Hunt should have about 20 task cards. Some task cards such as Task 3 (see above) are duplicated in PowerPoint four times. These kinds of slides don't take long and only require a dictionary, so multiple partners can complete this at the same time.
3. All task cards are placed in one central location (ex. kidney shaped table). If a task card requires a book, place it **INSIDE** of that book to keep things organized.
4. Partners may start with ANY task card. They don't have to go in order. They will return their task card to the central location when they are done and grab another.
5. Some partners may finish the Learning Hunt earlier than others. Always have a few "early finishers" activities available. (See below for examples.)
6. Set a goal and give a prize if the goal is met-MOST students should be able to complete 3-4 task cards within 30 minutes.
7. Students provide the teacher with feedback about the Learning Hunt. The teacher should carefully review this feedback and discard/replace tasks students deemed unbeneficial.
8. Student-Centered Assessment Ideas: Students will choose one option from the choice board to show

what they learned. The teacher should create a rubric for grading purposes.

What does the teacher do during Learning Hunts? What else should I know?

- Compiling resources to meet the standard(s) you are addressing and creating the Learning Hunt itself is the most time-consuming task. Once this is completed, your job becomes facilitator!
- During the hunt, the teacher is responsible for floating around the room to help when needed, keep students on task, and/or clear any misconceptions.
- Keep in mind, Learning Hunts use technology for some task cards, so there may be times when the teacher will need to fix issues that arise. *(Always have extra laptops/technology available.)*
- There may be times when a student must work alone for a variety of reasons (behavior issues, student preference, catch-up because of absences, etc.)
- Most Learning Hunts take 3-4 days to complete depending on your learners/schedule but encompasses a vast amount of information!
- The integrated subjects in the Learning Hunt (such as math and reading) should be **review**. For example, if the main focus is science, you do not want to incorporate new math or reading content in the hunt.

Conclusion

Many of us were taught through lecture. The teacher stood in front of the classroom and "taught us" everything we needed to know. Lately, there has been a shift in education that puts the student at the center of their learning. Integrating subjects and student-centered learning fosters a way of learning that students will see in real life (outside of the classroom). Learning Hunts provide students the opportunity to think critically, creatively, and synthesize knowledge beyond the classroom. To make activities such as Learning Hunts a regular part of our instruction, teachers must encourage all stakeholders (i.e. school districts, politicians, and parents) to allow and support this innovative approach which puts students in control of their learning. Finally, teachers must share with stakeholders, through personal experiences and data, the benefits of integrating subjects through student-centered activities.

Learning Hunts allow students to take ownership of their learning through valuable and connected experiences while staying engaged the entire time.

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Create a PowerPoint, Display, or write/perform a song of the- "Top 5 Things I Learned."	Create a web explaining how Ecosystems are connected to reading/writing, math, science, and social studies.	Create an article on the importance of the Ecosystem.
Create a game based on new information you learned from the Learning Hunt. It must include directions on how to play and be for 2+ players.	Conduct a survey for ½ of the students in our class on the most interesting thing they learned. Create a graph with this data.	Student Choice-Please get the teacher's approval.

Learning Hunt Reflection

Which task number was your favorite? _____ Why?	Which task number was your least favorite? _____ Why?	What questions do you still have after completing this learning hunt?
Do you have any connections with any of the tasks? Which one? _____ What are they? (text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world)	What's one thing you learned from this learning hunt?	Did you like working with your partner? _____ Why or why not?

EARLY FINISHERS ACTIVITY

Dream Ecosystem

Preview these wordless picture books by Aaron Becker for inspiration.



1. Draw a picture of your dream ecosystem.
2. On the back of your picture, create a t-chart and list at least 3 of the biotic/abiotic factors in your ecosystem.

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Early Finishers #2

- A Haiku is a Japanese poem that does not rhyme. It is a poem that describes something in nature. Haiku poems have three lines, with a certain number of syllables in each line.

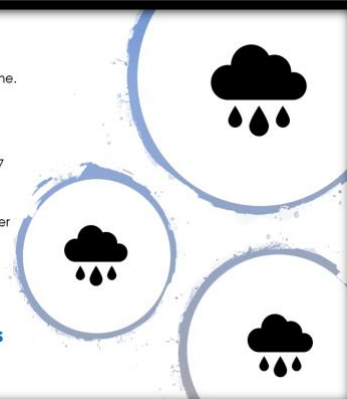
- The Haiku formula is Line 1 = 5 syllables Line 2 = 7 syllables Line 3 = 5 syllables.

- Write a Haiku about the ecosystem on the paper provided. (See example below.)

Abiotic rain

Falling on my windowpanes

Drip drop! They fall down.



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A Creative Solution to the Traditional School Schedule

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Abstract: This article examines the current traditional school schedule and its effects on teacher retention, student engagement, morale, and overall academic success. This article also explores the pros and cons of a four-day school week and offers an alternative weekly structure.

Keywords: four-day school, teacher retention, burnout, schedule

Introduction

Forbes Magazine Contributor Nick Morrison (2019) states, “The teacher shortage is reaching crisis levels as the number of educators leaving after just one year in the classroom has hit an all-time high” (para 1). In America, the number of teacher resignations has climbed to a shockingly high rate and more than 200,000 teachers are leaving the profession each year (Podolsky, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016). According to a Yahoo Lifestyle survey of 50 instructors (Hagiage, 2019), teachers are leaving the classroom due to budget cuts, classroom discipline issues including student violence, unrealistic and overburdensome teacher requirements, and standardized testing that squelches creativity in the classroom. These display only a few of our problems within the current educational system. It is time to explore some desperately needed solutions.

As a teacher for over 15 years, and an Academy Director for educationally challenged middle schoolers for three, I have tirelessly searched for a solution to solve the issue of student disengagement and teacher burnout. It was only after many years of observation and trial and error that I was able to find a possible solution to this problem, and the answer may shock you.

Traditionally, public school systems operate at a five-day school week schedule, roughly beginning at 8:00 a.m. and ending at 3:00 p.m. This is similar to an average adult’s work week, minus two hours – which is a tiresome schedule for young, energetic, and frankly, bored, adolescents in the classroom. Here we will look at the pros and cons of the four-day school week. Additionally, for those who need an alternative to this four-day solution, we will discuss the traditional five-day schedule when it is accompanied by an “Elective Friday.” In the same way adults look forward to

“Casual Friday” or “Payday Friday” at the office, students and teachers will have a chance to feel a payoff for their hard work on the fifth school day.

Pros of the Four-Day School Week

It is no surprise that teachers are leaving the field of education at startling rates, and many schools are looking for solutions to their shrinking finances, lack of teacher retention, and increasingly negative student behavior. “Stress and burnout are pervasive among public school teachers” (Israel et al., 2020, p. 794). I believe implementing a four-day school week could be the answer we have been searching for.

The number of rural school districts switching to a four-day school week growing, and many districts have chosen the four-day school week including Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Oklahoma and Oregon (Walker, 2019). In Colorado, 62 districts now follow a four-day schedule (Hewitt & Denny, 2018). In Missouri, 33 of the public schools have run on the four-day school schedule since 2010 and have seen impressive results (Hewitt & Denny, 2018). Many of these schools switched to a four-day week to improve the recruiting and retention of good teachers, increase professional development, and to balance their budget. Specialists have documented better attendance, improved morale, and less disciplinary problems since making the switch (Hewitt & Denny, 2018).

As a result, many schools have switched to a four-day week for financial reasons, to improve recruitment and retention of good teachers, and to increase time for professional development. These have resulted in a reduced number of student and staff absences, extra time for teachers to collaborate and plan, and a decrease in student disciplinary issues.

One positive outcome of the four-day school week was found that students were more engaged in extracurricular activities (Israel et al., 2020). Other positive outcomes include financial savings for the school districts (Yarbrough & Gilman, 2006). Contributors of the National Rural Education Association, Turner, Finch & Uribe-Zurain (2019), conducted a study of three rural school districts in the first year of the four-day school schedule. What they found was strong support for the four-day week from a high majority of the parents and positive responses from the students. Interestingly enough, in Merryville, Louisiana, students’ ACT scores rose, and the number of honor roll students doubled as a result of the four-day week switch (Turner, Finch & Uribe-Zarain, 2019).

Teachers are leaving the classroom due to budget cuts, classroom discipline issues including student violence, unrealistic and overburdensome teacher requirements, and standardized testing that squelches creativity in the classroom.

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Cons of the Four-Day School Week

While this alternative schedule may present itself with numerous benefits, all students are unique learners and not every child is guaranteed to be personally benefited. I recommend a four-day school week based out of successful experiences with my own students over time. For instance, the impact of switching to a four-day school schedule was at the center of a study done by Hewitt and Denny (2018). They found that overall, the five-day schools scored slightly better than the four-day schools. Their data concluded that student academic scoring should not be the determining factor for starting a four-day school week.

In a study on Midwest rural school districts (Turner, Finch & Uribe-Zarain, 2019), Missouri parents expressed concern for four-day school weeks regarding the lack of childcare for their elementary and special needs children on Fridays. Another concern was that children would not be provided lunches on Fridays if schools were closed. Another study done by Tharp, Matt, and O'Reilly (2016) found evidence suggesting that students of the four-day school week may not achieve the academic level of success as students in the five-day setting. Despite these concerns, the majority of the families who were surveyed remained supportive of the four-day schedule.

Personal Experience with the Four-Day School Week

Knowing the research presenting the pros and the cons of the four-day school week, I would now like to share what I have experienced and how I am achieving success within my academy for educationally challenged middle level students. For the first 15 years of my teaching career, I taught in a K-12 private school that followed a four-day week school. As a teacher and a mother of five children, I highly appreciated this schedule for many reasons, and it was clear that my fellow teachers preferred it as well. Many of us used Fridays at home for planning and grading, as well as taking our children to the dentist, doctor, and other necessary appointments.

Additionally, several times a year we were asked to attend professional development seminars or conferences, many of them being on Fridays and Saturdays. I noticed that, even though we attended workshops a few weekends throughout the year, teachers did not mind investing the extra time. I rarely experienced teacher burnout and often felt refreshed when Monday came around. My older children also attended a four-day school and especially benefited from the extra day to explore internship opportunities, attend lessons, or simply catch up on their sleep.

Alternative Solution to the Four-Day School Week: "Hands-On Friday"

At the academy I direct for educationally challenged students, we serve middle level learners who struggle to succeed in normal classroom settings and prefer to work in very small, tutorial classrooms. My academy offers core classes in a multi-sensory, project-oriented fashion. Before becoming the academy's director, I was a teacher at this academy Monday through Thursday, continuing my previous work schedule.

When I became director three years ago, I began to work the regular five-day school week because most of our parents preferred us to be open on the fifth day. Our students needed a day at the end of the week to not only apply what they have learned during the week, but to do it in a way that encouraged proper socialization, teamwork, and lots of fun! This was where I began to see that, even if a four-day school week is not feasible for an academy or school, there are still alternatives to the dreaded five-day schedule. I soon realized that our Friday classes could use a major facelift, so with a little creative thinking, I found the solution that has worked wonders for us.

I came up with the idea of a "Hands-On Friday." I wanted to bring the joy into our educational journey, which I believe I found with this new plan. On Fridays, we instituted a class called "Practical Math" which incorporates everyday activities to make harder subjects easier. Activities included following a recipe to understand fractions, grocery shopping to calculate sales taxes, and building blocks to visualize width and depth. We also go on traditional field trips, such as exploring local science museums. For our history class, students engage in hands-on projects and historical dramatizations. To allow our teachers a planning period and time for professional development, we outsource our Friday Science Lab, Taekwondo, and one elective.

I wanted to bring the joy into our educational journey, which I believe I found with this new plan.

Conclusion

It is my personal and professional recommendation that schools will benefit exponentially if they forego the traditional five-day week and adopt a four-day school week instead. "Stress and burnout are pervasive among public school teachers" (Bottiani et al., 2019, p. 36). If this alternative is not possible, my recommendation is to then consider adopting my "Hands-On Friday" program. At our Academy, we have found that our students now look forward to Fridays, instead of dreading yet another day in the classroom. Our teachers are also each given two free blocks on Fridays for planning and grading, which has successfully prevented burnout. As a result, our students have become confident middle schoolers who are project-oriented, and their attitudes toward school have changed for the better. Students feel more engaged, and teachers experience less stress as compared to the regular five-day school week. Though not every child will respond the same to a four-day school week – and teachers will come and go – I am confident that if we as educators do not change our aging routines and do what is best for our students, we will be doing a disservice, not only to students, but to the education field as a whole! Let us listen to the children – their struggles, desires, and tendencies – and give them the freedom to learn in a way they are excited about, not in a way they are dreading. It would behoove all educators, superintendents, and board members to be receptive to new ideas that may offer empowerment, encouragement, and increased engagement.

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Individualized Professional Development

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Abstract: A one-size-fits-all professional development program may not be beneficial to all of the staff in an educational setting. The following professional development program offers an alternative solution to traditional professional development methods, by allowing teachers to determine the strategies that they want to implement into their classroom. The implementation of these strategies and the reflection that goes along with it in the form of action research, allows staff members to determine which methods are most beneficial to them and the students in their learning environment.

Keywords: professional development, action research, strategies

Introduction

As the leader of professional development in my school, I spent many hours staring into the eyes of uninterested teachers last year. I also spent time fielding different variations of the question “Does this apply to me?” Every time I fielded these questions, I was transported to the previous year and the 14 years before that in which my seventh and eighth graders would ask me the same question when I taught them how to solve equations.

Even though the information and strategies that I shared with the teachers at my school were researched-based, effective strategies, because the teachers did not buy into them, the strategies were not as effective as they could have been. So, my principal and I discussed how we could make professional development more meaningful for teachers. Through our discussions and research, we decided to make the professional development more individualized. The most surprising part of the research was learning that individualized professional development for teachers is not a new idea. In 1982, Portner carried out a study for a school district in Connecticut in which teachers determined a personal action plan that included a topic, objectives, activities, and benefits. The teachers worked to complete their goals and objectives with support from their supervisor and a consultant (Portner, 1982).

Action Research

With the wide range of content areas, experience levels, skill levels, and will levels, we decided that implementing an individualized professional development plan in which teachers could seek out and find strategies that work for them would be beneficial for everyone involved. Teachers and support staff would find strategies, implement them into their classroom, reflect on the implementation in their classroom, and have discussions with their peers, coaches, and administrators. This process is a type of research and professional development called action research. This form of research is meaningful to teachers because it provides opportunities for them to find strategies that work for them. Instead of choosing a one-size-fits-all professional development model, teachers can engage in an action research model to seek out and find strategies that work for them.

Action research is an effective research model because it not only produces research, it also produces results. Rauch, Schuster, Stern, Pribila, and Townsend, 2014 state that “research which produces nothing but books will not suffice” (p. 14). They go on to describe action research as the process of educational practitioners applying research to their practice with the intention of improving both the research and the practice (Rauch et al., 2014, p. 7). The strategic implementation of a research-based strategy and the analysis of the results will drastically improve the practice of education practitioners. The solutions that result from an action research study are solutions that are proven to cause a “beneficial change for the people whose lives and work are affected by that research” (Rauch et al., 2014, p. 8).

Action research is an essential tool for educational reform, whether it focuses on teaching methods or learning methods, the practice of implementing a strategy, analyzing its outcomes, reflecting, and sharing with peers, yields strategies that could change the course of an educational organization. Because action research brings together literature, quantitative data, qualitative data, and practice, it is an innovative way to bring about change in an organization. The action research process provides “increased clarity and understanding that provide the basis for resolving the problem [or improving the practice] on which the study focused” (Stringer, 2014, p. 71). There are vast amounts of studies that use the theory of action research to explore and research educational methods; these studies have paved the way for educational organizations to provide optimal learning experiences for their students.

The Process

After determining that using an individualized professional development approach would be most beneficial to our staff, several studies and formats were explored. To ensure that the process met the needs of all of our staff, we decided to create

our own process, which would be a conglomeration of best teaching practices and additional components that would help our staff gain as much as they could from the process. We also decided that the use of action research would allow teachers to seek out and apply strategies that were most beneficial to their classes.

In this individualized professional development plan, teachers looked for a strategy based on a specific topic and implemented the strategy into their classroom. After the strategy was implemented, the teacher then shared the strategy and a reflection with others. Strategies were shared in a variety of methods and included a reflection. The methods that teachers used to share their results and reflection with the organization were created and outlined for them by the instructional coach. However, teachers were also allowed the autonomy of coming up with additional ways of sharing and reflecting on their learning.

Initially, we planned to allow staff members to determine the topic that they researched; however, after some guidance from our district leadership team, the process was modified to include a common topic for each staff member based on observational data. The observational data would be collected in the form of instructional rounds, carried out by district personnel, administration, and instructional coaches. This revision to the process provided additional structure to the process and further incorporated data into the process.

After the leadership team chose the topic for the month's professional development, teachers researched the topic and chose one or two strategies they could implement in their class. After they implemented the strategy(s) in their class, teachers then reflected on the strategy implementation using a variety of ways. The three ways that teachers were able to reflect were:

Learning Lab

Teachers research strategies and methods to improve in the month's area of professional development. This could include reading scholarly articles and books, observing pre-approved teachers, and/or working with an academic coach. The teacher then implemented this strategy(s) in his/her classroom, keeping a log of how often they used the strategy(s). After the strategy was implemented, the teacher then reflected on the process using a written narrative. Once the strategy was successfully integrated into the teacher's class, the teacher then chose another strategy.

#TMSPD

Teachers create their own social media post or interact with an educational social media post made by a fellow educator. The teacher then reflects on the content of the post and responds. Responses should include the hashtag #TMSPD.

Video Log

Teachers reflect on professional learning such as information from a conference, professional development that they

attended, or personal research and create a video log based on that reflection.

As the person in charge of professional development, I was responsible for reading and responding to the reflections. I also chose exemplars and strategies that were beneficial to the teacher that used them in his/her class and shared them with the school.

At the time of writing this article, we have been through several cycles of this professional development. Some of the areas that we have chosen as topics are formative assessment, questioning, and differentiating instruction. Teachers have researched, found, and implemented hundreds of strategies that have improved their teaching practice. For example, during the month of September when teachers were asked to research formative assessment, one teacher found a strategy called "Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down, Wave Hand". He gave the following reflection, "This week, I tried hand signals to assess student understanding. Thumbs Up for I understand and can explain, Thumbs Down for I do not yet understand, Wave Hand for I'm not completely sure about it. Most students give accurate signals. There are some students who give a thumbs up, but do not really understand. It allows me to group students who may be struggling with students who understand a concept. This frees me to assist small groups instead of getting held with one student for an extended time" (Gardner, 2020, personal communication).

Another teacher implemented a website called Pear Deck into her classroom as a formative assessment strategy. Pear Deck is a website that allows teachers to incorporate engagement and formative assessment in the classroom setting. "I did some research and implemented Pear Deck for the first time this past week. This resource allowed me to check in on students throughout the lesson on their computer. They were able to provide responses and comfort levels with the material. At the end of class, I was able to have them write or draw two things they learned from class that day. It was a really great resource and allowed for instant feedback" (Duncan, 2020, personal communication). These teachers along with the other teachers in our building have incorporated strategies that have positively impacted their teaching practice and shared these strategies with each other.

Conclusion

We feel that we are still in the beginning stages of implementing this professional development plan. However, teachers enjoy the autonomy of the individualized professional development and the reflections produced have been insightful. The staff are learning great strategies that are positively affecting the learning environment. In addition, the dialogue teachers have with the instructional coach and with each other is meaningful and serves as a way to further deepen the learning of all of the staff.

Professional development in the middle school setting spans a variety of specific areas that include but are not limited to instructional planning, teacher content knowledge, and content

delivery methods (Lee, Robinson, & Sebastian, 2012). Meeting the needs of all teachers in this area is impossible with a one-size-fits-all professional development model is extremely challenging; however, allowing teachers the opportunity to determine their own needs in a specific area and research strategies to meet these is an innovative way to meet all of the needs of the entire staff.

We have found that this professional development method produces effective strategies that work not only for our teachers, but also for our students. We have tried many professional development formats in the past, and this one has helped us to get closer to our vision of what we would like our school to be for all of the stakeholders involved. We would like for our professional development to be a place where students and teachers can learn through research, practice, and reflection. Based on principle 3 of Turning Points 2000, schools should be a place where teachers “improv[e] learning, teaching, and assessment for all students” (Jackson, Davis, Abeel, Bordonaro & Carnegie, 2000, p. 8). Our system of professional development allows teachers to meet this standard. Teachers can research a strategy that will work in their classrooms, implement it, reflect on the process, and share their learning with their peers. Other design points and principles included in Turning Points 2000 are the use of instructional strategies that help all students be successful and the creation of a school culture that helps to support student achievement (Jackson et al., 2000).

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To see more from Dr. Dirton, visit her blog at: www.facilitatingchaos.blogspot.com

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Are Your Students Held Accountable?

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Abstract: How do we hold our students accountable? As teachers, that is a question we face every day. This article describes several ways to help students become more accountable. A student-led parent-teacher conference puts the student in the spotlight and allows them to speak on their own education with family. “Classroom Court” allows for students to help decide if their classmates are following a rule established by the class. Lastly, project-based learning with student choice allows students the opportunity to stretch their imagination and be more creative with their learning.

Keywords: student-led conferences, peer mediation, project-based learning

Introduction

As educators we have heard every excuse in the book as to why or how students could not get their work finished. Who is to blame for this? Teachers? Parents? Administration? Or could it possibly be the students themselves? How can we change our students’ mindsets to hold them accountable not only for their actions but also for their education? This task is much harder than one would think. However, through personal research I have found and implemented some effective strategies to help develop a system of accountability for all students. By leading and changing my classroom to a more student-centered class, I have found new and more positive ways for my students to learn. They are learning more than just state standards at this point; they are learning life skills.

Student-Led Parent-Teacher Conferences

Although this may sound strange, asking students to lead parent-teacher conferences empowers them and allows them to have their own voice be heard. According to Donald Hackmann (2010), traditional parent teacher conferences can be seen by two points of view, the

teachers and the parents. For teachers it can cause stress “to explain why a student earned an unsatisfactory grade” (p. 2). Is it because the student is lacking the skills, or is it because the student chooses not to complete the work? It can also be stressful for teachers in situations in which parents do not attend and teachers are not able to communicate the important needs of their child. For parents, many times teachers are simply “affirming what they already know: Their child is either doing very well academical or is doing poorly” (Hackmann, 2010, p.2).

This led me to wonder how I could reframe parent-teacher conferences to focus on and empower the student. My students are now asked to create a presentation to show their parents at our conference. In this presentation, students can include current and past grades, graded work, and reflections on their graded work. This is a perfect way for students to show that they are thinking about their thinking (metacognition).

Using student-led parent-teacher conferences, I have found that many of my students did not know how to talk to their parents about their academic progress. Therefore, I allow my students to practice on me or my principal. I let them know they can take the conversation in any academic direction they would like. However, they must include their current and past progress. They should show their strengths and weaknesses as well as their areas of growth and/or decline in class. According to Werra (2018), “student led conferences connect kids’ core beings- who they are at home- with the important work of learning they do at school” (para 13).

Although I had several goals in mind for my students when I started doing student-led conferences, one of the goals Hackmann (2010) describes in his article is a goal I feel I am beginning to achieve. Hackmann’s Goal 1 is “to encourage students to accept responsibility for their academic progress” (p.4). I have found that when students have to discuss their academic progress with a parent, they tend to be more honest while I am a quiet observer in the conference. Instead of saying “I didn’t know about the assignment, or I thought I turned it in,” they are now accepting personal responsibility, stating things like “I forgot to do the assignment,” or “I didn’t do the assignment.” This has led to the realization that parents and students alike have changed the way they

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perceive my class. This allows for new academic conversations to happen outside of school.

Classroom Court

A second strategy I use in my classroom is maintaining a safe and respectful learning environment. Starting the first day of school, I introduce myself to my students and we, as a class, decide on the rules we all will have to follow, including myself, for the remainder of the school year.

Establishing group norms together fosters a sense of cohesiveness and belonging, and every student has “a role in this learning community that they had a share in building” (Merrill & Gonser, 2021, para 14). One rule that is a constant throughout all my classes is not bullying or “picking” on each other. This is a big rule for my middle school students. Many times, my students do not realize they are hurting each other and breaking trust that may have been built. Once the trust is broken it is hard to repair.

When students feel comfortable in class, they are more likely to ask questions and receive help without the pressure of other students bullying them. When someone breaks the rules, we hold a brief “classroom court.” The idea came to me as a form of peer mediation. The Ceceilyn Miller Institute (2021) describes peer mediation as “an early intervention resource for conflict resolution within a school” (para 7).

This approach allows students to take more ownership of the classroom they spend so much time in. This strategy can have a very positive impact on the classroom environment. Many times, the harshest critics in the classroom are the students. During this court, we have a jury of the student’s peers, and the jury decides if the student accused of bullying is guilty or innocent. If a student is found guilty, their punishment includes a personal apology to the student affected as well as a classroom apology for disrupting student learning. If the problem persists, I as the judge will take further action.

As a classroom teacher, you are probably wondering how in the world you would find time to conduct a classroom court. However, when I think about the time I have spent in the hallway addressing a student’s behavior one-on-one, or the amount of time I have had to stop students from arguing in the middle of class, or even the time that I have had to spend writing disciplinary referrals, all of that time adds up. In addition, the long term benefits make the investment of time worth it. As explained by Ersoy & Pehlivan Yilmaz (2018), “the learners’ level of maturity increase”

when exposed to the idea of a classroom court (p. 6). The article continues to acknowledge that this method also “improved inquiry skills and certain moral and democratic values such as respect, affection, trust and empathy among the learners” (p. 6). Now back to my original question: How do I have time to conduct classroom court? The answer is simple; our classroom court takes on average as long as an average bell ringer/class opener, and the occurrence of the classroom court dwindles as the school year progresses, as do the interruptions.

Project Based Learning

Throughout our nation today, many teachers are faced with students taking ownership of their own learning. Teachers near and far are trying to improve classroom climate and increase student engagement. Stephen Merrill and Sarah Gonser (2021) provide “a powerful argument to provide more student choice across every grade level: to shake up inflexible social and academic schedules, reduce one-way learning, and place more responsibility firmly in the hands of students” (para 2). By centering student choice, educators can “offer students scaffolded opportunities to practice decision-making, explore their academic identity, and connect their learning to interests and passions” (para 4).

A final strategy I use in my classroom is through project-based learning, which features student choice. According to the authors of *Peculiarities of Educational Challenges Implementing Project Base Learning*, “by transforming students’ work habits, the implantation of PBL (project base learning) initiatives brings new learning-teaching experiences and intangible changes to the education system (Vasiliene-Vasiliauskiene et al, 2020, p.42). Many times, when giving a project, I give my students a specific topic and a desired outcome. However, how they choose to define and deliver the project is entirely up to the student. For example, when my students finished learning about the Pythagorean Theorem, their project outline was to tell a story using and defining the Pythagorean Theorem in the real world.

Which platform they chose to tell their story is up to them. I had students create children’s stories, PowerPoints, Sways, Movies, and even podcasts. Their imaginations went wild and they looked forward to working on this project in and outside of the classroom. This allowed for their creative juices to flow in more ways than they even imagined.

Since my students were able to choose their layout for the project, they felt more connected to the project. My

students were so eager to submit their projects that over half of them submitted it early. They were constantly wanting to show me their work and looking for positive reinforcement, which was given to them. I have found that students respond positively to their learning when they get a say in how they are learning. My students took a greater interest in their own learning and learning outcomes. When thinking about what project based learning is to myself and my students, the following quote describes it best: “PBL (project based learning) is a student-centric methodology that allows opportunities in the educational environment” (Vasiliene-Vasiliauskiene, et al, 2020, p.147).

Conclusion

Allowing students to take charge of their education now will set them up for a more successful future. Sometimes our students can only see what is right in front of them. We as educators need to be role models and show our students what leadership, ownership, and pride in education looks like. We can show our students the places education can take them and the success it can bring them. We must show our students they can be great, but it all starts with them.

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Advocating for Adolescent Literature

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Abstract: We advocate building an extensive adolescent literature library to offer pre-service teachers access to diverse texts, more text choices, and more opportunities for self-selected reading. In addition, we suggest using a faculty and student book club to model reading, write about literature, and discuss adolescent literature across disciplines.

Keywords: adolescent literature, diversity, book club

Introduction

At the University of South Carolina Aiken, our pre-service teachers are required to take several stand-alone literacy courses that align with Read to Succeed competencies and requirements. In addition, every middle level education major is required to take an adolescent literature class during the spring semester of their junior year. The purpose of that class is to broaden preservice teachers' understandings of contemporary literature from a variety of genres and reading levels representing diverse perspectives. We are currently working on a project to expand an adolescent literature library and implement a book club for middle level education majors and faculty members across disciplines. Our ideas are undergirded by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) position statement (2017) which advocates for expansion of classroom libraries. Our plans for the library expansion project are supported by decades of literacy research (Allington, 2002, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2018; Krashen, 2011; Nystrand, 2006; Wu & Samuels, 2004) which suggest myriad benefits for literacy rich classrooms. As such, we will follow Fisher and Frey's (2018) four-pronged approach to: increase access to a wide variety of texts; offer students many choices of books; facilitate class discussions about texts; and offer book talk opportunities.

The Peter Effect

As teacher educators and former classroom teachers, we understand what it means to "be called upon to inspire their students with a love of reading" (Applegate et al., 2018, p.190). Yet studies indicate that too many preservice and

practicing teachers are not enthusiastic readers (Applegate et al., 2018; Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Nathanson, Pruslow, & Levitt, 2008). Describing this phenomenon as "the Peter Effect," Applegate & Applegate (2014) suggest that teachers cannot give students that which they themselves do not have. In other words, reluctant readers will likely have difficulty inspiring others to read. To help mitigate the Peter Effect, we are implementing an exciting new project to build a diverse library, create a community of readers, and promote positive reading habits among our middle level pre-service teachers, faculty, and staff. In doing so, we hope to improve reading skills, develop routine reading habits, and deepen teacher candidates' enthusiasm for reading. In turn, they will be better positioned to influence their own students to become enthusiastic readers.

Diverse Texts

In the article *Elements of a Literacy Rich Classroom Environment*, Erin Lynch (2021) advises giving students access to "a library that includes a wide variety of books at various levels and incorporates many genres" (Element 6, para 1). We contend that pre-service teachers need access to books that reflect the backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of their future (and increasingly diverse) students. These books should "embrace diversity, honor culture and individuality" (Brunow, 2016, p. 63). They will also help broaden the perspectives of monocultural students and faculty who have had limited experience with people who do not look like them. It is essential to offer experiences "that embrace diversity, honor culture and individuality, and promote the growth of individual students in a classroom community environment" (Brunow, 2016, p. 64).

To build this library, we consulted colleagues, spoke with librarians, and examined American Library Association award winners to develop a diverse list of texts (see Appendix) which represent a wide range of genres (see Table 1). Final selections were made based on diversity and representation including, but not limited to, genres, genders, races, cultures, places, and subjects. These book selections are just a start, as we plan to expand the library with a compendium of books over time.

Table 1

Genres of Selected Books

Adventure
Biography, autobiography, and memoir
Contemporary realistic fiction

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Graphic novels
 Historical fiction
 Horror, suspense, mystery, thriller
 Humor
 Nonfiction
 Romance
 Science fiction, fantasy, dystopian literature
 Self-help, inspirational
 Sports
 Verse novels

Self-Selected Texts

The research on self-selected reading is robust and conclusive (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Bertschi-Kaufmann & Graber, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2018; Gambrell, 1996; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Students read more, understand more, and are more likely to continue reading when they have the opportunity to choose what they read. In the article *Authentic Literacy Experiences in the Secondary Classroom*, Valerie Brunow (2016) urges, “We must honor students as unique individuals in the process of learning - it is essential to understand that every student is diverse and comes equipped with a diverse literacy background” (p. 63). We argue that this applies to college students as well. Every student has an individual reading level and reading rate. As such, we recommend a move away from a one-size-fits-all approach and a single list of required texts and, instead, offer choices from a balance of texts.

Leading by Example

Brunow (2016) asserts that leading by example is a powerful tool. She advocates having teachers model their own reading and the decisions they make as a reader. For this reason, we will ask middle level education faculty to participate in an adolescent literature book club. Professors will model reading, participating in book club discussions, and keeping a reading journal. We agree with Brunow (2016) that writing about reading is as important as reading itself (p. 68). One way to help students define themselves as readers is to model the reading journey. By modeling reading and purposefully engaging with a text, educators can help students see what this should look and feel like. In the article *Six Literacy Experiences Children Should Have Every Day*, Vicki Urquhart and Dana Frazee (2012) recommend that students read something that they choose and write about reading that is personally meaningful.

We believe a book club approach will encourage middle level education colleagues to create a literacy-rich classroom environment for themselves and their students across disciplines. Brunow (2016) emphasizes that readers should be working in reading partnerships. Readers thrive with opportunities to reflect on their ideas and engage in book talks. An additional advantage of engaging faculty in a book club is the potential for the content of these texts to “spill over” into the science, social studies, and mathematics methods courses –

thereby linking other content areas with USC Aiken’s literacy courses.

This project addresses Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction in the South Carolina Literacy Competencies for Middle and High School Content Area Teachers. Specifically, teachers use instructional approaches, materials, and an integrated, comprehensive, balanced curriculum to support student learning in reading and writing. They use foundational knowledge to design or implement an integrated, comprehensive, and balanced curriculum. Teachers understand that high engagement during reading requires access to texts, time to read, reading success to promote agency, and a supportive literacy community. They provide students with time to read self-selected texts to construct knowledge about topics being researched and ensure that students consistently experience success with texts, so they develop a positive identity as a reader (South Carolina State Department, 2021).

Conclusion

The new adolescent literature library will offer diverse texts, more text choices, and more opportunities for self-selected reading. In addition, middle level faculty will model reading, writing about, and discussing adolescent literature texts with students using a book club approach. We plan to evaluate the success of this project through a reading inventory assessment; data tracked on the Goodreads app; and narratives from participants’ reading journals. Over a 3-year period, we will look for evidence of 1) increased number of books read each year; 2) increased interest in different topics and genres; and 3) written reflections that demonstrate the ability to identify important ideas in the readings, articulate the complexity of issues, and recognize different points of view.

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Appendix: Recommended Contemporary Texts for an Adolescent Literature Library

Abdel-Fattah, R. (2017). <i>The lines we cross</i> . Scholastic.	978-1338282054
Acevedo, E. (2020). <i>Clap when you land</i> . Quill Tree Books.	978-0062882769
Adeyemi, T. (2018). <i>Children of blood and bone</i> . Henry Holt and Co.	978-1250170972
Albertalli, B. (2015). <i>Simon vs. the homo sapiens agenda</i> . Harper Collins.	978-0062348685
Alexander, K. (2020). <i>King and the dragonflies</i> . Scholastic Press.	978-0702302817
Altebrando, T. (2016). <i>The leaving</i> . Bloomsbury Publishing.	978-1681194035
Angleberger, T. (2010). <i>The strange case of Origami Yoda</i> . Amulet Books, Scholastic.	978-1419715174
Arce, J. (2018). <i>Someone like me: How one undocumented girl fought for her American dream</i> . Little, Brown Books.	978-0316481700
Baker, K. (2020). <i>The water bears</i> . Yearling.	978-1984852236
Barson, K. (2014). <i>45 pounds (more or less)</i> . Speak.	978-0142422656
Bell, C. (2014). <i>El Deafo</i> . Harry N. Abrams.	978-1419748318
Berrier, R. (2010). <i>If trouble don't kill me</i> . Crown.	978-0307463067
Boulley, A. (2021). <i>Firekeeper's daughter</i> . Henry Holt and Co.	978-1250766564
Boyne, J. (2007). <i>The boy in the striped pajamas</i> . David Fickling Books.	978-0385751537
Bracken, A. (2021). <i>Lore</i> . Disney-Hyperion.	978-1484778203
Callendar, K. (2019). <i>Hurricane Child</i> . Scholastic Press.	978-1338129311
Colbert, B. (2021). <i>The only black girls in town</i> . Little, Brown Books.	978-0316456401
Collins, S. (2008). <i>The hunger games</i> (series). Scholastic.	978-0545670319
Condie, A. (2012). <i>Matched</i> (trilogy). Dutton Books.	978-0525426264
Courtney, N. J. (2019). <i>All-American Muslim girl</i> . Farrar, Straus and Giroux Books/Macmillan.	978-0374309527
Craft, J. (2019). <i>New kid</i> . Quill Tree Books.	978-0062691200
Dashner, J. (2017). <i>The maze runner</i> (5-book series). Delacorte Press.	978-1524771034
Draper, S. M. (2012). <i>Out of my mind</i> . Atheneum Books for Young Readers.	978-1416971719
Draper, S. M. (2015). <i>Stella by starlight</i> . Atheneum Books for Young Readers.	978-1442494978
Draper, S. M. (2020). <i>Blended</i> . Atheneum Books for Young Readers.	978-1442495012
Duany, G. (2020). <i>Walk toward the rising sun: From child soldier to ambassador of peace</i> . Make Me a World.	978-1524719401
Engle, M. (2006). <i>The poet slave of Cuba: A biography of Juan Francisco Manzano</i> . Henry Holt Books for Young Readers.	978-0805077063
Forman, G. (2014). <i>If I stay</i> (2 book series). Dutton Books for Young Readers.	978-0147515025
Forna, N. (2021). <i>The gilded ones</i> . Delacorte Press.	978-1984848697
Giles, L. (2020). <i>The last last-day-of-summer</i> . Versify.	978-0358244417
Giles, L. (2021). <i>The last mirror on the left</i> . Versify.	978-0358613329
Gratz, A. (2017). <i>Refugee</i> . Scholastic.	978-0545880831
Green, J. (2012). <i>The fault in our stars</i> . Dutton Books.	978-0142424179
Green, J. (2019). <i>Turtles all the way down</i> . Dutton Books.	978-0525555377
Guerrero, D. (2019). <i>My family divided: One girl's journey of home, loss, and hope</i> . Square Fish.	978-1250308788
Hagan, E. (2021). <i>Reckless, glorious, girl</i> . Bloomsbury Children's Books.	978-1547604609
Hale, S. & Pham, L. (2017). <i>Real friends</i> . First Second.	978-1626727854
Hamilton, B. (2006). <i>Soul surfer</i> . MTV Books.	978-1416503460
Johnson, K. (2020). <i>This Is my America</i> . Random House Books for Young Readers.	978-0593118764
Johnson, V. (2019). <i>The Parker inheritance</i> . Arthur A. Levine Books.	978-0545952781
Kinney, J. (2011). <i>Diary of a wimpy kid</i> . (set of 4). Scholastic.	978-0141341415
LaCour, N. (2020). <i>Watch over me</i> . Dutton Books for Young Readers/Penguin Random House.	978-0593108970

Lai, T. (2011). <i>Inside out and back again</i> . Harper Collins.	978-0061962783
Lee, L. (2020). <i>I'll be the one</i> . Katherine Tegen Books/HarperCollins.	978-0062936929
Levine, K. (2016). <i>Hana's suitcase: The quest to solve a Holocaust mystery</i> . Crown Books for Young Readers.	978-1101933497
Lord, K. (2010). <i>Redemption in Indigo</i> . Small Beer Press.	978-1931520669
Magoon, K. (2019). <i>The season of Styx Malone</i> . Yearling.	978-1524715984
Mbalia, K. (2019). <i>Tristan Strong punches a hole in the sky</i> . Rick Riordan Presents.	978-1368039932
McDunn, G. (2020). <i>Caterpillar Summer</i> . Bloomsbury Children's Books.	978-1547603145
Mendoza, P. & Sher, A. (2020). <i>Sanctuary</i> . G.P. Putnam's Sons/Penguin Random House.	978-1984815736
Na, A. (2016). <i>A step from heaven</i> . Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books.	978-1481442367
Newman, L. (2020). <i>October mourning: A song for Matthew Shephard</i> . Candlewick.	978-1536215779
O'Brien, S. (2014). <i>Jouanah: A Hmong Cinderella</i> . Lee & Low Books.	978-1885008411
O'Connor, B. (2017). <i>Wish</i> . Square Fish.	978-1250144058
Palacio, R.J., (2017). <i>Wonder</i> . Alfred A. Knopf.	978-0375869020
Patterson, J. & Tebbetts, C. (2016). <i>Middle school, the worst years of my life</i> . Little, Brown and Company.	978-0316276917
Pride, C. & Piazza, J. (2021). <i>We are not like them</i> . Atria Books.	978-1982181031
Prince, L. (2014). <i>Tomboy: A graphic memoir</i> . Zest Books.	978-1936976553
Reynolds, J. (2017). <i>As brave as you</i> . Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books.	978-1481415910
Rhodes, J. P. (2016). <i>Bayou Magic</i> . Little, Brown Books.	978-0316224857
Riordan, R. (2006). <i>The lightning thief</i> . Puffin Books.	978-0786838653
Roanhorse, R. (2018). <i>Trail of lightning</i> . Gallery/Saga Press.	978-1534413504
Roth, V. (2016). <i>Divergent</i> . Harper Collins.	978-0062387240
Sanchez, J. T. (2021). <i>We are not from here</i> . Philomel Books/Penguin Random House.	978-1984812285
Smith, S. L. (2010). <i>Flygirl</i> . Penguin Books.	978-0142417256
Stevens, C. (2018). <i>Dress codes for small towns</i> . Harper Teen.	978-0062398529
Thomas, A. (2018). <i>The hate U give</i> . Harper Collins.	978-0062498533
Thomas, A. (2021). <i>Concrete rose</i> . Harper Collins.	978-0062846716
Thomas, A. (2020). <i>Cemetery boys</i> . Swoon Reads/Macmillan.	978-1250250469
Thrash, M. (2017). <i>Honor girl</i> . Candlewick.	978-0763687557
Tingle, T. (2014). <i>House of purple cedar</i> . Cinco Puntos Press.	978-1935955245
Tyre, L. L. (2015). <i>Last in a long line of rebels</i> . Nancy Paulsen Books.	978-0399168383
Tyre, L. L. (2019). <i>Hope in the Holler</i> . Puffin Books.	978-0399546327
Vawter, V. (2014). <i>Paperboy</i> . Yearling.	978-0307931511
Vermette, K. (2018). <i>A girl called Echo</i> . HighWater Press.	978-1553796787
Watson, R. (2017). <i>Piecing me together</i> . Bloomsbury.	978-1681191072
Watson, R. (2019). <i>What Momma left me</i> . Bloomsbury.	978-1681199498
Wein, E. (2021). <i>The enigma game</i> . Little, Brown Books for Young Readers/Hachette.	978-0759557628
Williams-Garcia, R. (2015). <i>Gone crazy in Alabama</i> . Quill Trill Books.	978-0062215895
Woodson, J. (2016). <i>Brown girl dreaming</i> . Puffin Books.	978-0147515827
Yang, G. L. (2021). <i>American born Chinese</i> . First Second.	978-1250811899
Yoon, N. (2019). <i>The sun is also a star</i> . Delacorte Press.	978-0553496710
Youngblood, L. (2021). <i>Forever this summer</i> . Little, Brown Books.	978-0759555204
Yousafzai, M. (2013). <i>I am Malala: The girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban</i> . Little, Brown & Co.	978-0316322409
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The South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed publication that highlights research-based best practices that improve middle schools and the learning that occurs within and outside of the classroom. Readers of this journal are generally teachers, administrators, and other educators who are interested in the issues that young adolescents ages 10-15 and educators of those individuals face. The South Carolina Association for Middle Level Education Journal is published once a year in an online format.

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